Towards the Understanding of the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity: A Narrative

Embedded Study

Leidy Paola Carrera Parra

Towards the Understanding of the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity: A Narrative

Embedded Study

Leidy Paola Carrera Parra

Thesis Director:

Álvaro Hernán Quintero Polo (PhD)

"A thesis submitted as a requirement to obtain the degree of M.A. in Applied Linguistics to the

Teaching of English"

Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas

School of Science and Education

Master Program in Applied Linguistics to TEFL

Bogotá, Colombia

2020

Note of acceptance

Thesis Director: _____

Álvaro Hernán Quintero Polo (PhD)

Juror: _____

Jairo Enrique Castañeda Trujillo (PhD)

Juror: _____

Leidy Marcela Chacón Vargas (MA)

Acuerdo 19 de 1988 del Consejo Superior Universitario.

Artículo 177: "La Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas no será responsable por las

ideas expuestas en esta tesis".

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, Salomón Carrera Duarte.

You are always with me.

My deep gratitude goes to Professor Álvaro Quintero, who expertly guided me through this research. Thank you for your enthusiasm for the project and for your support and patience.

My appreciation also extends to my participants, who enabled this research to be possible. Thank you all for your time and inspiring stories.

I would also like to thank all my family and friends for their unconditional support in this process.

A special thanks to my loving and supportive partner. Your unwavering presence brings light into my life every day.

Finally, many thanks to everybody who gave me words of encouragement throughout this time. You don't know how important those small acts of kindness were.

Abstract

This qualitative research study describes and interprets the way language teachers (re)construct their identities when asked to make sense of their teaching and academic experiences through narratives. The study took place in a private Colombian university and participants were three English language teachers who experienced the shift from being face-to-face teachers to distant and virtual instructors. Language teachers' written stories based on their academic and teaching experiences were explored and analyzed through a narrative inquiry perspective. The theoretical framework was used to a) highlight the (re)construction of language teacher identities (LTIs) as a cognitive, social, and historical process (Barkhuizen, 2017; Block, 2014); b) show the (re)construction of LTIs as a prospect for teachers' professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2002); and c) show how sense-making and meta awareness practices can encourage language teachers to take a more critical position toward their teaching practices by reinforcing the ideas of agency and empowerment (Giroux, 2000; Freire, 1970). Findings revealed that the (re)construction of LTI is conditioned by a permanent desire of ensuring coherence between what they feel and what they do. Human and social issues embedded in their teaching experiences are key referents toward the understanding of their teachers' selves. The study concluded that negotiation activities are a great source of identity formation. Negotiation activities led teachers to effectively manage conflicts and tensions around contextual teaching factors. Finally, teachers' sense of analysis, innovation, and change benefited their professional development.

Keywords: language teacher identity, identity construction, teachers' narrative inquiry, teachers' professional development.

Table of Contents

Table of Illustrations

Table of Annexes

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research was intended to produce significant information around language teachers' identity and how they (re)construct their identity through reflection and understanding of meaningful experiences. Language teachers' stories from the past, present, and future were explored through a narrative inquiry perspective to contribute to the identification of noteworthy issues. The study adopted a socio-critical language perspective to support the reflective and transformational components that emerged out of the narrative practice.

The need to show the issues that converge in the process of (re)construction of language teacher identity (LTI) was the starting point for this research. Theoretically, the study was informed by the concepts of language teacher identity (LTI) and identity formation. The study was intended to give a voice to those who work behind the "*screen,*" dealing with the demands and challenges of alternative and complex teaching settings. As a researcher, I firmly believe that language teaching research within distance and virtual settings must be promoted. It is a way of acknowledging the human and social components that underlie such practices.

The main body of this paper consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces and describes the research phenomenon to contextualize the research question and objectives that oriented the study. In Chapter Two, a discussion around the literature that supported the study is presented- such literature is centered on language teacher identity as the umbrella term. The same chapter proposes the development of three subsections that are an account of the issues that theoretically and practically support the concept of identity construction. Chapter Three describes the research design, including a description of the type of study, context, participants, researcher's role, and instruments. In Chapter Four, data analysis illustrates each of the stages

and findings. The category and subcategories that emerged out of this process will be explained in detail. Finally, Chapter Five presents the study's conclusions and shows valuable connections for further research.

Rationale

The relevance of the study relies on the need to gain understanding of the way language teachers (re)construct their identities when connecting and making sense of experiences that have constituted sources of meaning in their stories as teachers. As the study demonstrates, distance and virtual environments lead to a range of possibilities for transforming teaching beyond traditional practices. Challenges in how teachers understand what it means to teach and learn a language, as well as on "how-to-embrace" such practices, were a meaningful starting point to conduct this research. Language teachers described their experiences in these alternative settings and were able to interpret them in the context of past experiences and future projections.

This study will be of importance in the context of language education since it will provide meaningful knowledge about the way alternative settings provide scenarios for identity (re)construction, a subject that has not been widely explored locally or globally. Teachers can understand how developments in language education are a source for professional development; they can participate actively in the understanding of their teaching practices.

This study is of value for the applied linguistics field in both local and global contexts since it explores how technology-based education and its alternative contexts reveal significant information about how teachers build professional knowledge. This research provides a new view on language teaching and learning for further analysis and consideration and will be a key referent for more informed practices.

Moreover, this study is the result of strong personal and academic motivations. The focus of my inquiry has led me to new fields of knowledge that I had not explored. I have gained relevant information about my own teaching experience that has encouraged me to build a critical understanding of my everyday practice. In the same way, I have developed the need to contribute academically to my job setting, which I consider to be innovative and challenging.

Finally, this study generates academic knowledge and understanding regarding the construction of EFL teacher identity within educational settings that are based on technological innovations and new modes of interaction. Reflections on practices and data gathered through teachers' narratives will provide relevant information about teacher identity and professional development, and hence this study continues the line of research of Processes of Teacher Education and Development.

Statement of the Problem

This research addressed a real and genuine issue that emerged out of the challenges that the relationship between technology and education has brought for language teachers. This correlation has been a source of new considerations regarding language and teaching practices. Advancements in technology have mediated changes in educational practices. Technology has responded to the demands of a globalized world, and in the education field, it has facilitated more access to a diversified set of methodologies.

This study was carried out in a Colombian private university that offers undergraduate degrees in education. The bachelor's degree options include programs in childhood pedagogy and special education. To ensure that the programs are accessible to students from different parts of the country, they are delivered in a virtual teaching and learning environment. The virtual environment is supported through the use of different tools such as a virtual room, printed

material, and the "teleclass" (televised teaching). As described by Martínez and Osma (2018), the teleclass is conceived as a real-time encounter mediated by satellite technology where teachers and students (from different places) can interact by means of a variety of pedagogical and didactic strategies. This methodology has meant changes in interactions and teaching modes. Such changes have also been brought into language teaching, and instructors are asked to teach a foreign language under the particularities of that methodology while dealing with their own beliefs and prior experiences regarding language teaching.

By virtue of the above-mentioned issues, the research interest unfolded naturally. My own transition from being a face-to-face language teacher to distance and virtual increased my interest in the subject. I found myself confronted by new challenges associated with this shift. The challenges involved a permanent reflection about how to be a language teacher in a distance and virtual setting, along with the need to make sense of my practices within the particularities of this alternative environment. I would later come to the understanding of how such issues can be explored under the light of language teacher identity.

In addition to my own reflections, I discovered that my workmates were experiencing similar concerns. My workmates, as well as participants in this study, were three English language teachers who also experienced the shift from face-to-face teaching to distance and virtual environments. They expressed their apprehension about this new experience through informal and formal talks around the issue. These talks had a reflective tone and were a significant source in acknowledging the need for language teachers to be able to voice their concerns, especially those teachers who are involved in transitions over time and are learning to cope with new contexts and practices.

Teachers participated in discussions regarding their teaching practices through weekly academic meetings organized by the institution. During these meetings, teachers were asked to analyze different aspects regarding their language teaching practices (pedagogical and methodological concerns, curriculum, material, interactions, etc.); however, they also served as a means for socializing their significant experiences of being a language teacher in this new alternative setting. I started keeping a record of such natural teacher insights through handwritten notes that helped me come up with the topic of my research. At this point, I understood that my research interest was not solely an individual concern; it was also grounded in a collective academic need that validated the existence of the problem.

In this section, I highlight some of the issues that came from the informal (friendly talks with my workmates) and formal (institutional academic meetings) settings. The identified issues are presented considering frequency and significance.

1. Teachers expressed how the use of virtual technology has challenged their previous assumptions about language teaching supported by technology. Their new considerations turned around virtual teaching as a human and social activity.

2. Teachers expressed how innovative modes of interaction, such as the *teleclass,* have challenged their traditional ways of approaching language teaching. There were situated reflections around technology management (television studio, camera management, digital learning material design, etc.) and their own beliefs and principles regarding language teaching and learning.

3. Teachers constantly discussed how to co-construct significant language teaching experiences based on a wide range of socio-cultural contexts. The acknowledgment of the

extent of their language practices disclosed their interest in embracing students' contexts and realities.

4. Teachers discussed how they were portraying themselves as distance and virtual teachers. They continuously strive to make sense of the experience and how it means a constant learning process of who they are and who they want to become as language teachers.

It is important to address the practical and theoretical concerns of the problem. First, studies addressing similar issues led me to identify the conceptualization of my research interest, namely language teacher identity (re)construction. This concept allows me to understand the way language teachers' significant experiences (being exposed to alternative language teaching settings) came to be a powerful source for (re)shaping their identities by making sense of who they are and who they want to become as language teachers.

A crucial study that was aligned with my interest was one that explored the concept of language teacher identity based on a narrative practice developed by language teachers from distance universities in the UK and Australasia. As concluded by Shelley et al. (2013), context and experience are significant bases for the reconstruction of language identities. They also found a connection between affective aspects and cognitive development. This study illustrated the great potential of narratives as sources for collecting teachers' insights regarding their experiences.

Similarly, Bukor (2011) made a significant contribution to the field by carrying out a study about the reconstruction of language teacher identity from a holistic view. The holistic view determined the impact teachers' personal and professional experiences have on language teacher identity. This study contributed to the understanding of identity construction as a result of interpretations participants provided of experiences based on interaction between personal and

professional issues. It led to identifying the relevance of providing teachers with opportunities

for disclosing life experiences as a construction of a big story that values the intertwined

relationship of different life events.

Another remarkable contribution was White (2017). This author exposed interesting facts

about how language teachers embedded in alternative settings (distance and virtual

environments) have responded to challenges. I felt moved by the following insight she shared

under the frame "Another way of being a language teacher":

"…In March 1983 I returned to New Zealand to take up the position of lecturer in

linguistics and second language teaching at a "dual mode" university, meaning that

courses were taught in different modes for what were called internal and extramural

(distance) students. I settled into my office and set to work, feeling very unsure as to how

I was going to do the "other" half of my work, the distance part… (p. 107)"

This introspective piece of her story enhanced my strong desire to give voice to distance

and virtual language teachers who are experiencing similar circumstances. Teachers' identities

evolve as a result of new challenges, including, for instance, the progressive development of

technology and education. Making sense of language teachers' significant experiences allow for

an understanding of the issues that contribute to the (re)construction of their identities.

With a view to understanding such concerns, the following research question was set to

guide the study: What does distance and virtual English teachers' narrative practice reveal about

the (re)construction of their language teacher identities? The development of the research

question was centered on the following general research objective: To describe and interpret the

issues that emerge from distance and virtual English teachers' (re)construction of their language

teacher identities (LTIs) through their narrative practice. Additionally, a specific objective was

established: To unveil the aspects distance and virtual English teachers feel are meaningful when telling stories about themselves to understand LTI construction as related to the development and strengthening of language teachers' sense of agency and empowerment.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

"*Human beings are storying creatures. We make sense of the world and the things that happen to*

us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to ourselves and to other

people." (Sikes & Gale, 2006).

The theoretical discussion proposed in this chapter is from a social and critical

perspective from which the concept of language teacher identity (LTI) and three key issues are

viewed as interrelated: 1) (Re)construction of LTI through reflection and sense-making, 2)

(Re)construction of LTI and context: a transactional perspective, and 3) (Re)construction of LTI

as a source for professional development and agency (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Interrelated Issues for the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity
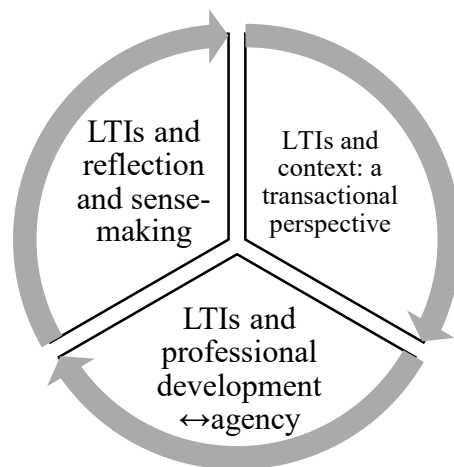
The above diagram depicts the understanding of how language identity is built based on a

co-constructing perspective that integrates relevant issues such as reflection, sense-making,

contextual factors, professional development, and agency. Therefore, this research shows

different views of identity that value the cognitive, social, and critical constituents that converge

during the process of identity formation. First, the cognitive view values reflection that grounds

the process. Second, the social view recognizes identity formation as a context-related activity.

Lastly, the critical perspective comprises the transformational component. A variety of

theoretical elements that adhere and bond with the essence of this study will now be discussed.

(Re)construction of LTI through Reflection and Sense-Making

This component understands identity construction as an ongoing self-making process

whereby language teachers are constantly trying to understand who they are and who they want

to become. Teachers reflect on their experiences with the purpose of acknowledging the

meaningful issues that give sense to their practices. Under this view, teachers are not conceived

as mere instrumental and passive agents; they (re)signify themselves by means of constant

(re)construction of their identities.

In this regard, it can be said that identities are not only the result of present experiences,

but are an assemblage of our past, present, and future. As Block (2014) says, "Being a language

teacher is an ongoing, narrated process which brings together experiences in the past and present,

as well as those anticipated in the future. LTIs are thus also storying—through the process of

narrating who they are, teachers make sense of their experiences and indeed re-shape those

experiences" (p. 199). This author supports two important issues of this study. First, identity

comprises experiences over time and second, it is a never-ending process through which

identities can be shaped and re-shaped. Teachers as storytellers evoke and narrate their own big

stories as language teachers with a view to (re)construct themselves within a historical frame (no

lineal) where the understanding of their significant experiences contribute to ensure the process

of identity formation.

Thus, the manner in which teachers make sense of their practices leads them to shape and re-shape their own identities. This sense-making process is given by the interpretation of experiences they are exposed to in different contexts. Such a process is determined by a cognitive perspective. According to Barkhuizen (2017), this relates to the fact that teachers constantly struggle to make sense of themselves. The cognitive perspective also considers teachers' beliefs, theories, and philosophies about language teaching. Consequently, the cognitive perspective can be understood as an introspective process that leads to the understanding of the self as a teacher.

It is possible to assume identity as a reciprocal interaction between the self and experiences (how experience shapes the situated self and how the self shapes experience). It means teachers (re)construct their identities based on a constant and mutual interaction between the situated experiences and their significant apprehension. In the same line of thought, Borg (2006) outlines teachers' identities under a cognitive perspective as a practice related to what they do, think, and know. Therefore, there are many factors such as practices, thoughts, and knowledge that interact simultaneously toward the construction of identity.

A reflective-guided practice constitutes a crucial path for understanding language teacher identity and its construction. In language teaching, teachers' reflection involves a deep understanding and interpretation about who they are and who they want to become. Such reflections can be nurtured by attaching meanings to people, contexts, and events that have impacted their teaching experience. Hence, reflection practice implies not only the individual's reflections (self as teacher), but how they are part of a social practice where external elements play a significant role.

Moreover, reflective practice relates to identity process construction in the sense that it is the teacher who explores himself under a frame of settings and roles that impact the understanding of their own identity. As Burns and Richards (2009) have noted: "Identity reflects how individuals see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings" (p. 5). For example, teachers who work under distance and virtual teaching contexts question themselves in regard to their functional roles in these type of settings. However, reflection does just encompass the roles they perform or are asked to perform, but on how they (re)construct their identities as teachers when these roles are challenging and institutionally pre-established.

From this systematic reflection perspective arises another key aspect for this research: the transformative essence of language teachers' identity. Reflection needs to be linked to concrete action that leads to a transformation practice, where teachers acknowledge those changes to impact their selves and their practices. In fact, Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) have stated that for teachers "it is impossible to speak about the 'self' when there is no reflection" (p. 114). Promoting teachers' awareness about the evolving nature of their identities is very important.

Some studies have addressed similar concerns regarding the need of promoting reflection and sense-making practices under the light of language teacher identity (re)construction. A local study by Quintero (2016) showed the power of nine pre-service English language teachers' written life stories in the (re)construction of their true selves. Their introspective practice exposed the relevance that meaningful others, the human dimension, and the transformative essence play in such process. In a similar way, an action research study by Alvarado, et al. (2019), showed how exposure to a reflective practice helped strengthen EFL teachers' emerging professional identities. Findings highlighted that reflective practices enhanced teachers' ability to problem-solve and become more aware of their ever-changing needs. Finally, Yuan (2018)

carried out a study about two pre-service teachers' reflective learning, including a variety of integrated and interactive tasks. Teachers were involved in collaborative lesson planning, group consultation, microteaching, and videoed reflections. Teachers benefited from the reflective tasks and gained understanding of their identity construction.

(Re)construction of LTI and Context: A Transactional Perspective

Language teacher identity has a strong connection to the context where a specific practice is embedded. Teaching and learning processes are fostered by interaction according to the conditions determining the practice. In addition, contexts inform the construction of a teacher's identity in the sense that they promote an interrelation between the individual and the external factors (context) that mediate the practice. Individual factor refers to aspects associated with a specific teacher where cognitive, emotional, physical, and experiential issues converge. External factors refer to external components that influence the teaching setting and that can be understood from a social and material perspective.

This view was expressed by Duff (2014), who said that "Language teacher identity…arises out of the intersections within and across two particular sets of factors: (1) personal biography … and (2) local socio-educational contexts" (p. 199). LTI is not the outcome of an isolated (re)construction process. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a kind of simultaneous practice that shows how relevant the analysis of a teacher's identity is in its particular setting. The term transactional implies a dynamic interplay where internal and external factors are negotiated and transacted. In the case of distance and virtual teaching settings, teachers determine the manner in which they adopt and adapt certain methodologies for language teaching. Oppositely, the conditions of the practice also determine how a teacher carries out a practice under certain conditions.

Similarly, Barkhuizen (2017) exposes how identity (re)construction is a social practice. Identity construction is referred to as a negotiation practice where social contexts play a determining role. For instance, teachers who work under the particular conditions set by a distance and virtual teaching context will need to address the social factors that embed their practice and determine how such component contribute to the understanding of their identities as language teachers.

In fact, Martel (2012) points out that, "In symbolic interactionist terms, actual identities refer to negotiated identity positions, an internal-to-the-teacher construct, while designated identities refer to role expectations, an external-to-the-teacher construct. Role expectations and identities are in continual, mutually shaping interaction with each other" (p. 22). According to the author, there is a *negotiated identity* when the inner part of the teacher adapts to the particular conditions of the teaching practice as a result of a negotiating activity. Second, a *designated identity* responds to the adaptation perspective as an imposed practice that will challenge the teacher's identity. Consequently, teachers' identities are seen as something negotiated or designated based on interactions promoted by the context itself.

This understanding of LTIs leads to another relevant reflection that has to do with the manner in which interactions between negotiated and designated identities end up in the configuration of tensions associated with the concept of identity. As Golombek (2010) highlights, conflicts and tensions arise out of the interaction between language teachers' past experiences and exposure to alternative practices and settings. These conflicts and tensions provide opportunities for development and understanding of teaching practices.

In the case of distance and virtual teaching practices, the transactional process implies a more complex understanding of how interactions help foster LTIs. Contexts mediated by

technological-support embrace dynamic and flexible features that challenge traditional contexts. Teachers are dealing with new teaching environments that demand new understandings in their identities as teachers. As White (2009) has exposed through her work on teacher identity within distance and virtual educational practices, LTI is "multiple, dynamic, and conflictual, closely related to socio-cultural contexts, and is constructed, enacted, and negotiated largely through discourse and interaction" (p. 335-336). This author presents key fundamentals for the comprehension of the complex process of the (re)construction of language teacher identity by acknowledging the significance of context and negotiation activity.

Under the same vein, some studies have shown the undeniable connection between the (re)construction of LTI and context. A representative case study by Salinas (2018) explored the process of professional identity construction of two EFL student-teachers from a socio-cultural perspective. The study revealed dynamic components of the process and determined how personal and external factors are interconnected. External factors included learning environments and practicum experiences. Song (2016) carried out a research study about how shifting teaching contexts derived from globalization has meant new demands for English language teachers. The study determined how emotional responses to this shift impacted teacher identity formation and practice. Finally, a study by Pennington (2016) illustrated the link between personal, contextual, and professional factors. The study accounted for the continually evolving nature of LTI and demonstrated how it can be developed through experience and teacher education. Teachers' individual characteristics are integrated within the specific contexts of teaching.

(Re)construction of LTI as a Source for Professional Development and Agency

This research on teacher identity conceives this concept as part of a formative process that contribute to professional development. In fact, there is a conceptualization of teacher's

identity as an ongoing learning process associated with the development of a professional

identity (Ten Dam & Blom, 2006). A construction or reconstruction involves making sense of

and giving meaning to learning, and seeing oneself as a central participant in activities and

processes.

Under this view, professional development is understood as the result of interaction

between knowledge and experiences that show not only identity formation but reveal significant

information about professional development. For instance, teachers' evolving practices lead them

to project themselves within specific teaching settings, reject other settings, or think of ideal

settings. This could be related to a constructivist view of teacher development (Johnson &

Golombek, 2002).

Many different perspectives become relevant when talking about language teacher

identity, including sense-making (cognitive), transactional, reflexive, transformational, and

developmental practices. There is, however, an implicit aspect that has a great impact on this

research: the critical aspect. If we as teachers are challenged to carry out critical teaching

practices, what about being critical in regard to ourselves?

Teachers need to be encouraged to carry out critical actions toward themselves in order to

make them aware of how they build and rebuild their identities. This can be done by empowering

them through socialization whose aim is to make sense of their remarkable experiences and

backgrounds. It is an invite to think about identity as not just a matter of assuming roles and

functions in context, but as a process of meta-awareness of the who, what, how, and where that

promotes critical understanding. In this respect, Ramanathan (2002) writes that, "it is crucial for

all language teachers to engage in peeling away the layers that make up the common sense or the

natural if only to understand how their knowledge/cognitions are being shaped. Encouraging this

meta-awareness of their socialization process is the first step toward making them critical, proactive educators" (p. 65). Hence, teachers involve in reflective practices become more aware of the issues that demand critical views, which lead to more informed and responsible practices.

Indeed, developing a critical language teacher identity is fundamental when language teachers participate in such a complex and dynamic mode as distance and virtual teaching settings. As White (2017) has stated, teachers' identities are called to develop critically adaptive learning. This concept refers to four interconnected processes of agency, emotion, discourse and narrative, and reflection. In this sense, teachers reflect critically on how significant they find their experiences under specific settings and how this experience re-shapes their identity.

It can be said that the critical aspect will contribute to the making of further decisions regarding teaching practices. When teachers analyze, interpret, and make sense of their own experiences, they will be able to elaborate a critical stance toward their themselves and their actions. This process is connected to the concept of agency defined by Giroux (2000) as follows: "Agency-the linking of capacities to the ability of people to intervene in and change social forms-offers hope and a site for new democratic relations, institutional formations, and identities (p. 353)". This concept fits the essence of this study by recognizing the power of teachers' reflections to undertake actions towards the conflictual issues they question and encounter over time.

By the same token, empowerment turns out to be an essential element for teacher's self-transformation. As Freire stated (1970), "empowerment is a process of discovery and action through dialectic reflection, which in turn causes critical thinking by allowing the exchange of views and experiences (p. 10)". This view fits the understanding of language teacher identity as a result of exposure to meaningful and challenging practices over time. The study recognizes the

need to boost teacher's self-confidence to undertake actions that involve critical positioning. Teachers' empowerment comprises active agents who seek to have their voices heard.

Some remarkable studies show the understanding of how LTI involves a discussion around the concepts of professional development and agency from a socio and critical perspective. Firstly, Teng (2019) carried out a study that aimed at understanding teacher autonomy, agency, and identity from four EFL student teachers in the Chinese EFL context. The study showed that teachers encountered constraints regarding curriculum, evaluation systems, and social settings. Such constraints became crucial sources of development of innovative practices where teachers exerted their sense of autonomy, agency, and identity. Likewise, White (2007) explores the way in which teachers' identities are challenged when experiencing transitions to distance teaching environments. The author concluded that the tensions resulting from such shifts and how teachers accept and resist them constituted a vehicle for the (re)construction of LTI in the context of innovation in language teaching.

All the above-mentioned theoretical and practical concerns provided this research with a precise and contextualized understanding of the essentials of the (re)construction of LTI. As evidenced by the deep and sustained discussion, the three components that fit the nature of this research study are centered in reflection and sense making activities, the significance of context, and the transformative fact associated with the sense of professional development and agency. These three components account for a situated understanding of the process of identity formation. With this view, the following chapter aims to reflect this awareness. The next section describes the research methodology used to explore the concept of (re)construction of LTI, contextualizes the research study, and validates the use of teachers' written life stories as the data gathering instrument.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This chapter describes the decisions made regarding the research framework with the purpose of addressing the research question: What does distance and virtual English teachers' narrative practice reveal about the (re)construction of their language teacher identities? Based on the question, the following two objectives were determined: 1) To describe and interpret the issues that emerge from distance and virtual English teachers' (re)construction of their language teacher identities (LTIs) through their narrative practice and 2) To unveil the aspects distance and virtual English teachers feel are meaningful when telling stories about themselves to understand LTI construction as related to the development and strengthening of language teachers' sense of agency and empowerment.

Therefore, the research design includes a description of the type of study, the context, the participants, the researcher's role, the instruments, and procedures for data collection.

Type of Study

This study was oriented by the principles of qualitative research. This type of research aims at the comprehension of the phenomenon under flexible and natural circumstances. As Creswell (2019) explains, qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Thus, I conducted a reflective practice that led teachers to unveil their insights about their identities by means of written life stories.

In this regard, the study adopted a descriptive and interpretative paradigm that guided the data collection and analysis. The study used language teachers' stories to interpret issues around their identity (re)construction. Goodwin and Mora Pablo (2012) describes the interpretative

paradigm as the idea that humans are different and experience natural events in different

manners; therefore, their reality is socially constructed. This research valued each participants'

perspectives as fundamental for the understanding of the phenomena from both individual and

collective constructions.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as interpretative,

material practices that transform the world. This idea perfectly fits the essence of this study by

adding the transformative component a research process entails. Thus, findings obtained through

the data analysis account for significant contributions in the academic field and provided

participants with a natural scenario for making sense of their teaching experiences.

In virtue of the above, this study used narrative inquiry as the research method. The

principles of this method were fundamental both in deciding what type of data to collect and how

to analyze them. According to Barkhuizen (2014), "Narrative inquiry is an established umbrella

term for research involving stories" (p. 3). Stories are central in narrative inquiry, bearing in

mind that they are a bridge allowing us to connect with our past, present, as well as envision our

future. Through stories, we can also learn about the particularities of a small group in a local

context. Hence, this study collected teachers' stories by means of a narrative-guided practice

where they were able to (re)construct and connect themselves with their academic and work

significant experiences over time.

Also, Barkhuizen (2013) introduced the concept of *narrative knowledging* to understand

storytelling as a meaning-making activity where cognitive and social issues converge. First of

all, storytelling is a social practice for the fact that narratives are discursively constructed with

others. Secondly, making sense of experiences through narrating is conceived as a cognitive

activity. Both the social and cognitive aspects involve the researcher and the participants as the

storytellers. The researcher works closely with the participants to generate and analyze data.

Stories are co-constructed when sharing the interpretation and the analysis with the participants.

In this regard, the researcher and participants in this study engaged in a narrating activity that

aimed at collaborative working to make sense of teachers' significant experiences.

Context

The study took place in a private Colombian university that offers distance and virtual

programs related to the education field. The institution is supported by a logistics operator that

provides satellite technology for the development of what has come to be known as "Sistema

Polimodal". This type of modality integrates the use of different elements such as a LMS

(Learning Management Environment), printed material, and the "teleclass" (televised teaching).

Undergraduate degrees are offered throughout the different regions of the country under

inclusion, pertinence, and coverage principles.

The institutional mission is to offer access to high quality and relevant undergraduate

programs within a framework of inclusion and respect for cultural diversity. It seeks to help in

the formation of integral professionals who are committed to their country. The university

aspires to be recognized for its academic excellence, inclusion, and social responsibility at both

the national and international levels. With a view to contributing to the development of society,

educational practices are oriented around integral formation, innovation, entrepreneurship,

employability, sustainability, and accountability.

Liberty, equality, respect, solidarity, honesty, and justice are institutional core values that

ground and enliven the university's identity. They comply with the principles of the humanistic

approach to education that guide the institution. In this respect, social constructivism as the

pedagogical model serves as a basis for understanding the teaching and learning processes, the

student, the teacher, and the didactic and pedagogical strategies, among others. The pedagogical model envisions learning as a socially constructed activity, where prior knowledge and interaction are determining factors. Under this view, the teacher is considered a mediator and facilitator of learning opportunities and the student is an autonomous being, holder of significant knowledge.

The study was granted institutional authorization to be conducted. The only requirement was to formally socialize the research content. Therefore, an opening meeting was carried out to inform the academic community about the particularities of the project. During this meeting, language teachers were informed about my interest in making them direct participants of the study.

Participants

The participants in this study were three distance and virtual English language teachers. They voluntarily accepted being part of this research and were willing to share their significant experiences. They were considered active participants during the development of the study; beyond the academic scope, I understood them as creators of their own stories. Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that the criteria for selection was based on purpose and convenience regarding the study phenomenon, having particular regard to the following considerations.

The three language teachers shared similar academic and teaching backgrounds. As part of their academic formation, they studied undergraduate degrees in fields like language and linguistics. They also have had more than three years of experience teaching English as a foreign language across a range of settings, including high school (adolescents) and university (adult).

Finally, a key factor for selection was that all three were experiencing the same shift from being face-to-face language teachers to distance and virtual ones. The first experience as language tutors was given at the university referral. They shared the same issues and concerns regarding how to be a language teacher in a virtual and distance environment.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study is understood as an interpreter of teachers' stories. Narrative research, as defined by Clandinin and Connely (2000), is "a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (p. 20)". Under this view, the researcher plays a crucial role in the way stories are gathered and analyzed.

Instruments

This study adopted a narrative inquiry perspective and teachers' written life stories were the main source for data gathering. Participants in this study were involved in a narrative practice that was developed during three stages: introspection, interpretation, and prospection. As Kramp (2004) says, "stories assist humans to make life experiences meaningful. Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future" (p. 107). Consequently, the process of (re)construction of language teacher identity was analyzed by understanding teachers' stories that responded to a bigger story enclosing experiences over time. To collect teachers' stories, I adopted the model of introspective practice proposed by Quintero (2016). The introspection activity was intended to encourage participants to get involved in a reflective practice towards (re)construction of significant events and their meaning.

Another source of data collection was the use of narrative interviews. As Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2007) state: "The narrative interview (henceforth, NI) envisages a setting that encourages and stimulates an interviewee (who in NI is called an 'informant') to tell a story about some significant event in their life and social context" (p. 3). NIs defy the traditional question-answer schema and provide an environment for stories to emerge in a natural and spontaneous way. Thus, this instrument was developed for validation purposes regarding the stories' interpretation stage. It was used to contrast the researcher's interpretation of stories with the participants' interpretation.

In this way, the data collected took the form of three written life stories that accounted for each teacher's big story and a narrative interview that served as data validation. The data analysis was driven by the purpose of describing and interpreting relevant issues that were unveiled as meaningful in the process of (re)construction of LTIs.

Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by principles of privacy and confidentiality. The researcher designed an informed consent form through which participants became aware of the research purposes and data collection procedures. Participants also learnt about how their significant stories would be used to generate knowledge about the (re)construction of LTIs. They agreed to participate in the study by signing the informed consent document. Needless to say, participants' real names were not used at any stage of the document construction (see Appendix 1).
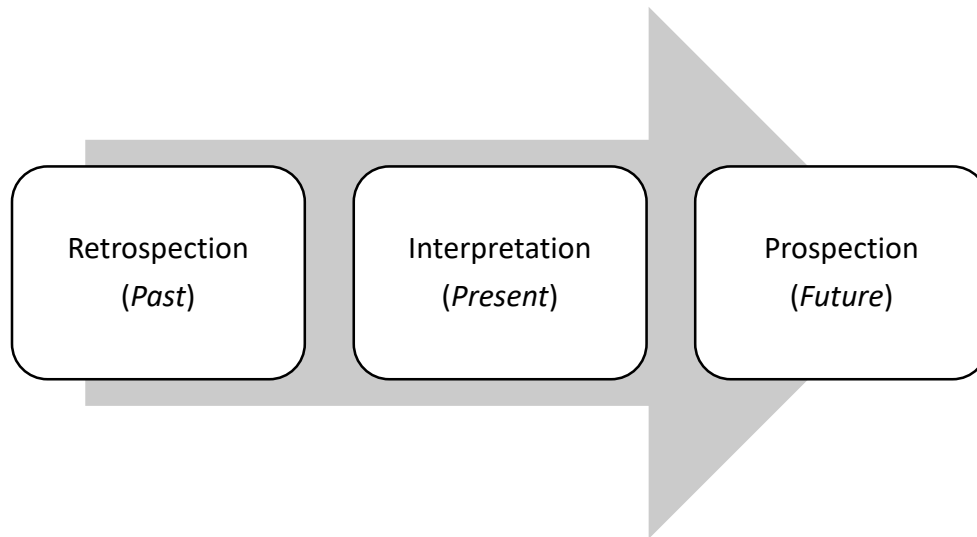
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter aims at reporting on the findings resulting from the study. As previously

stated, the study took place in a private Colombian university with three distance and virtual

language teacher participants. The purpose of the research was to describe and interpret the way

language teachers (re)construct their identities when progressively making sense of their

teaching and academic experiences by means of narratives. Consequently, language teachers'

written stories based on their significant academic and teaching experiences were explored and

analyzed through a narrative inquiry perspective. This chapter details the data collection

procedure, the framework of analysis, and the findings that emerged.

Data Collection Procedure

The study adopted a model of introspective practice that took the shape of teachers'

written life stories (Quintero, 2016). Guided reflective writing was developed during three stages

that were intended to explore the past (retrospection), present (interpretation), and future

(prospection) perspectives. The first written life story was retrospection upon experiences in

previous academic and teaching settings. The second one was interpretation regarding teaching

experiences within the distance and virtual context. Finally, participants wrote a third story

aimed at developing awareness of the kind of language teacher they want to become as part of

their teaching prospection. Hence, each participant wrote three life stories that accounted for

their past, present, and future insights regarding their teaching experiences, and that accounted

for who they are and who they want to become as language teachers. Guidelines for writing were

included to illustrate the data collection procedure (see Appendix 2).

Figure 2

Model of Introspective Practice (Adapted from Quintero, 2016)

```
┌─────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────┐
│  Retrospection  │   │ Interpretation  │   │   Prospection   │
│     (Past)      │   │    (Present)    │   │    (Future)     │
└─────────────────┘   └─────────────────┘   └─────────────────┘
```

The initial step of data gathering was to get participants familiar with the particularities of a narrative practice. The most important focus of the storying process was to guide participants towards a reflective process where they felt free to write in a natural mode. An introductory session was carried out to contextualize participants in the model of introspective practice and the focus of each of the stages. Hence, they were able to read examples of teachers' narratives from other studies. They gained an understanding that guided their narrative practice by the richness of the content and not limited by length, grammatical accuracy, or other concerns. I encouraged participants to let their insights flow in order to get the best out of this narrative activity. Some participants' narratives were included to illustrate the data collection procedure (see Appendix 3).
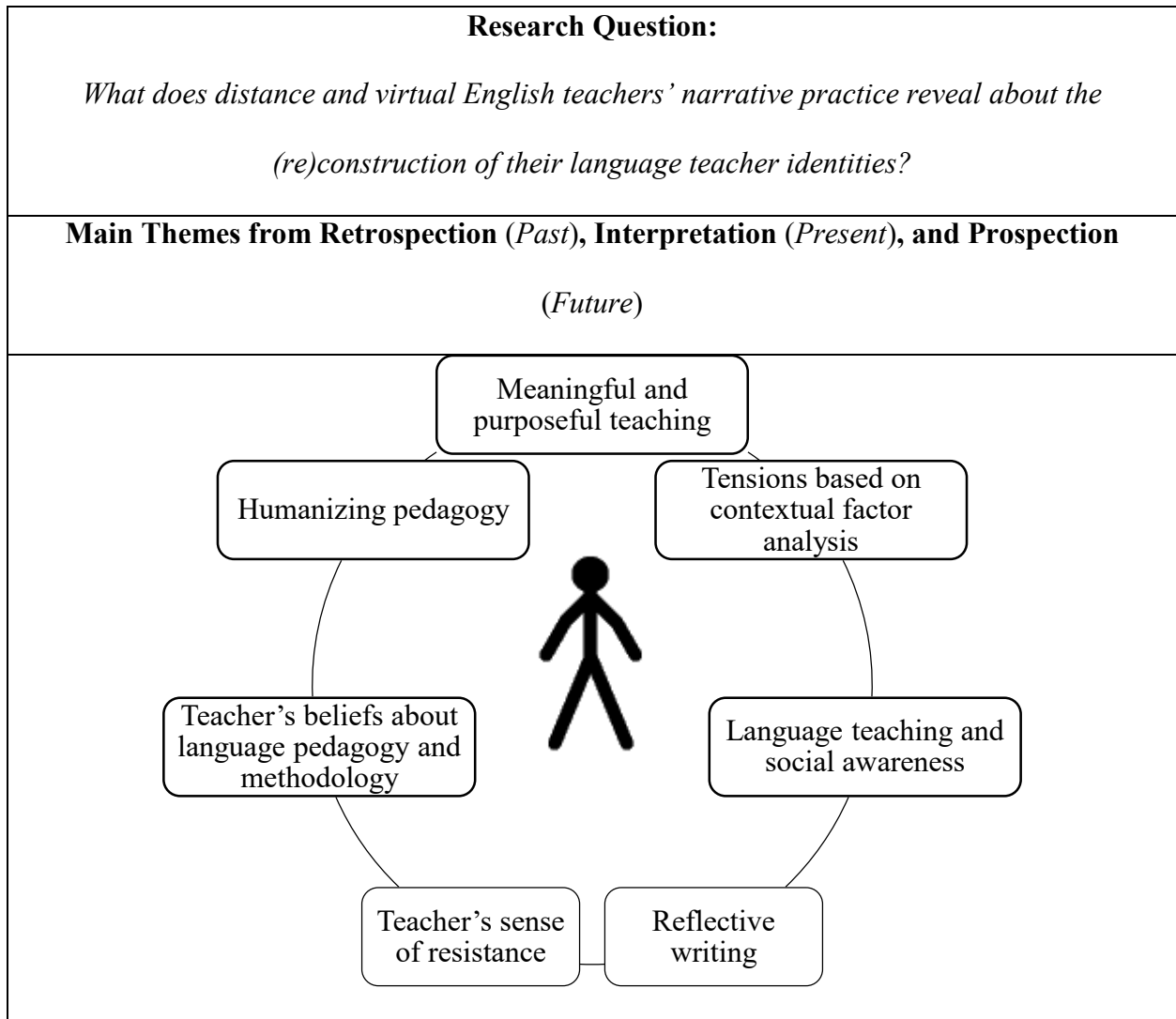
Framework of Analysis

Data (written life stories) were analyzed using thematic content analysis and categorization, which are dimensions included in Barkhuizen's model of narrative analysis

(2013). He states that the power of narrative analysis relies on content, with emphasis on "*what*

narratives are about; what was told, and why, when, where, and by whom*" (p. 8). Therefore, the

analysis of narratives accounts for the interactions constructed within each story, based on key

people, places, and events. Bell (2002) showed that researchers should aim at understanding the

content of participants' experiences and their reflections, a method that has become known as

narrative inquiry. Thus, participants' narrative texts were analyzed in terms of the significance

of their content and not by language or structure.

As a preliminary stage of the data analysis, the stories were read and re-read with a view

to making preliminary interpretations. Additionally, this reading process was enriched by writing

notes in the stories that helped represent ideas and thoughts that emerged as part of identifying

recurrent themes. The reading process was a demanding task, but a most satisfactory one since I

felt grateful to participants for their narratives, as they shared significant issues through their

stories.

Moreover, color coding was implemented to highlight the *who*, *where*, and *when* based

on the model of life stories proposed by Barkhuizen (2014). This process contributed to the

identification of commonalities that led to themes. As Barkhuizen (2013) and Riessman (2008)

express, *themes* are identified by finding commonalities across participants' stories.

In this study, color coding was used as a way of determining significant themes and

interactions among people, places, and events. Color coding made visible how the stories showed

crossing points in these three aspects. At this point, it is relevant to clarify that this strategy did

not fragment data for analysis purposes; it was implemented to highlight these factors and their

interactions. Codes turned into significant themes that displayed useful and accurate

representations of the data.

Figure 3

Emerging Themes from Data Coding

Research Question:
What does distance and virtual English teachers' narrative practice reveal about the (re)construction of their language teacher identities?
Main Themes from Retrospection (*Past*)**, Interpretation** (*Present*)**, and Prospection** (*Future*)

Meaningful and purposeful teaching

Humanizing pedagogy

Tensions based on contextual factor analysis

Teacher's beliefs about language pedagogy and methodology

Language teaching and social awareness

Teacher's sense of resistance

Reflective writing

In the above figure, the identified themes are presented. The themes were identified based on a global comprehension of teachers' stories. Such stories revealed teachers' insights about key sources that facilitated a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their lives as language teachers. Teachers acknowledged the importance of human and social issues to convey the significance of who they are and what they do. Tensions and their sense of resistance proved to be enabling

factors for identity construction. Finally, the writing activity was linked to reflection and critical understanding of the (re)construction of language teacher identity.

Besides the analysis of written life stories, an individual interview was carried out after the three stories were written. The strategy elicited participants' insights around three themes that were identified in the written life stories. Such themes were illustrated with extracts of their own narratives (see Appendix 4). The purpose was to nurture a spontaneous narration where participants felt comfortable to expand on their stories' interpretation. Finally, they were asked to share testimonies regarding the experience of being part of a narrative practice. Figure 4 displays the themes whereby the narrative interview was conducted.

Figure 4

Themes for Narrative Interview (NI)
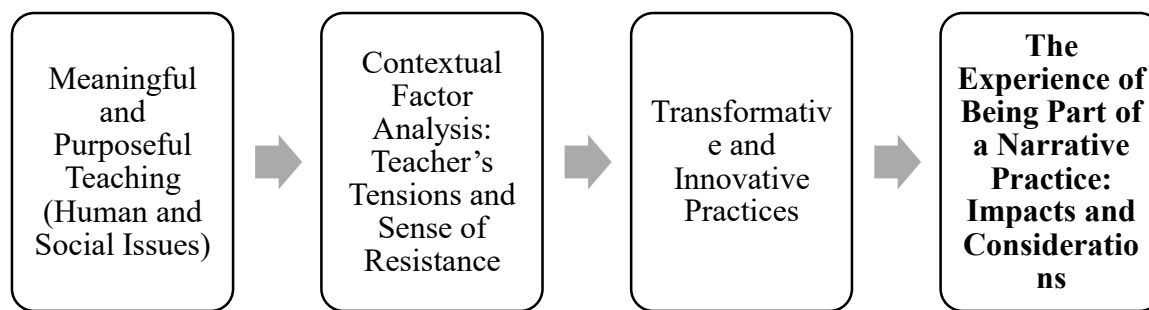
The audio data from narrative interviews were transcribed manually. The criterion was to transcribe selected excerpts that helped strengthen the thematic interpretation. This instrument served two purposes. First, it was a source for participants to share and enrich their stories as this study understood the construction of narratives as an individual and social sense-making activity. As Canagarajah (2004) stated, we construct ourselves through narratives and by sharing those narratives with others. Second, it contributed to validate the data analysis process. My interpretations regarding participants' stories were contrasted or validated during these face-to-face encounters.

Figure 5

Model of Data Validation (Adapted from Quintero, 2016)
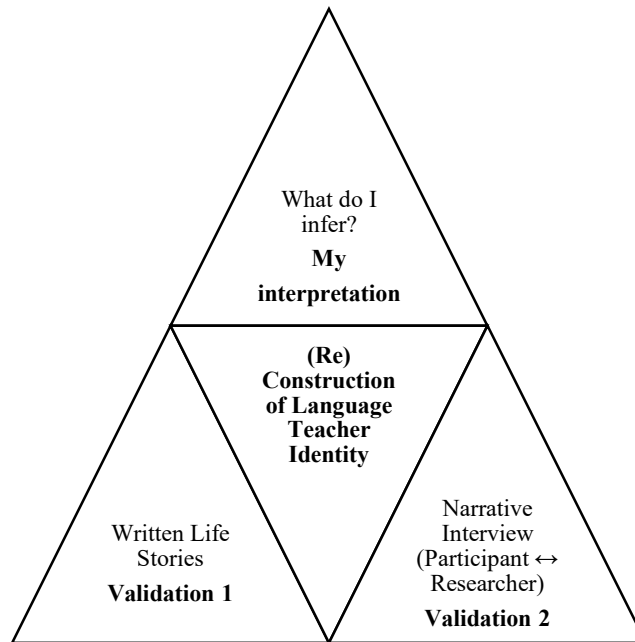
In this regard, Figure 5 exemplifies the methodological triangulation that was used to provide credibility and robustness to the data analysis. This type of triangulation uses more than one method to study a phenomenon and aims to confirm findings, increase validity, and enhance comprehension of the study (Casey & Murphy, 2009). The two qualitative instruments (written life stories and interviews) were used to compare interpretations of results. In addition, the theory that supported the development of this study was used as a source for data validation.

Findings

The data analysis process led me to the identification of one core category and four subcategories under which themes were grouped, as illustrated in Figure 6. They disclosed relevant connections with the research objectives that oriented the study. The core category is called The interconnectedness between the *<being>* and *<doing>* in the (re)construction of LTI. This category represents an answer to the research question by unveiling the linkage between the

intertwined issues that teachers found relevant to (re)signify themselves as language teachers.

The word "*interconnectedness*" helps to illustrate such interdependence.

Figure 6

General Research and Specific Objectives Core Category and Subcategories

Research Question
What does distance and virtual English teachers'
narrative practice reveal about the (re)construction of
their language teacher identities (LTIs)?

General Objective
To describe and interpret the issues
that emerge from distance and virtual
English teachers' (re)construction of
their LTIs through their narrative
practice.

Specific Objective
To unveil the aspects distance and
virtual English teachers feel are
meaningful when telling stories about
themselves to understand LTI
construction as related to the
development and strengthening of
language teachers' sense of agency
and empowerment.

Core Category
The **interconnectedness** between the
<being> and *<doing>* in the
(re)construction of LTI

Valuing the **human** and **social**
constituents of language teaching

Managing **conflict** and **tensions**
through negotiation

Teachers as **analytical**, **innovative**,
and **transformative** learners

The transformative **power** of **storying**
in the (re) construction of LTI

By the same token, the four subcategories were determined. The first subcategory is

defined as Valuing the human and social constituents of language teaching. It shows teachers'

underlying beliefs about language teaching as a human activity. The recognition of the

significance of context is also displayed. The second subcategory is called Managing conflict and

tensions through negotiation. It attempts to expose how significant encounters involving conflict are a fundamental component for identity construction. The third subcategory is Teachers as analytical, innovative, and transformative learners. It is an account of how teachers' sense of analysis, innovation, and transformation contributed significantly to their continuous (re)construction as language teachers. Lastly, the fourth subcategory The transformative power of storying in the (re)construction of LTI recognizes the remarkable consistency throughout teachers' stories in regard to the development and strengthening of their sense of agency and empowerment gained from the narrative practice.

The discussion of findings was supported by the construction of representative extracts of teacher stories and selected excerpts from narrative interviews to illustrate the issues that emerged for each category and subcategories. Stories were not analyzed as independent units because the three narratives accounted for a larger story that showed crossing points, which in turn showed the process of identity (re)construction. Permanent connections between the kind of language teacher they are and want to be (imagined identities) are made through the narratives. Hence, the story extracts used in this section were included in the development of the text based on content concerns around categorization and not writing stages.

The Interconnectedness between the <Being> and <Doing> in the (Re)construction of LTI

The core category provides relevant information about how language teachers constantly (re)construct their identities when they find connections between who they are and what they do regarding their work and academic experiences. Throughout the construction of their narratives (retrospection - interpretation - prospection), they revealed the significance of their experiences based on the intertwined relationship between feelings and thoughts that guided their selves as teachers. They persistently reflected on the fact of ensuring coherence between these two

constituents: the *<being>* and the *<doing>* and by reenacting such connections, they find ways of

(re)constructing themselves as language teachers.

In the same vein, Figure 7 illustrates the identified issues that fostered negotiation and

(re)construction of LTI. The use of the interconnected circular diagram aims at reinforcing the

understanding of LTI as a cyclic process of (re)construction where multiple issues converge and

are mutually enriching. These issues contributed to the understanding of the need for the

interconnectedness between the *<being>* and the *<doing>* components. Teachers' beliefs and

emotions, teachers' personal traits, context and people, and possible conflicts around teaching

practices arose as crucial elements. Such issues were visible when examining the historical (but

no lineal) process of identity construction (experiences over time). The specific issues were

grouped into the subcategories based on content-related validity. The subcategories cannot be

understood as independent entities since they developed remarkable crossing points that

sustained the main category.

Figure 7

Issues that Foster Negotiation and (Re)construction of LTI
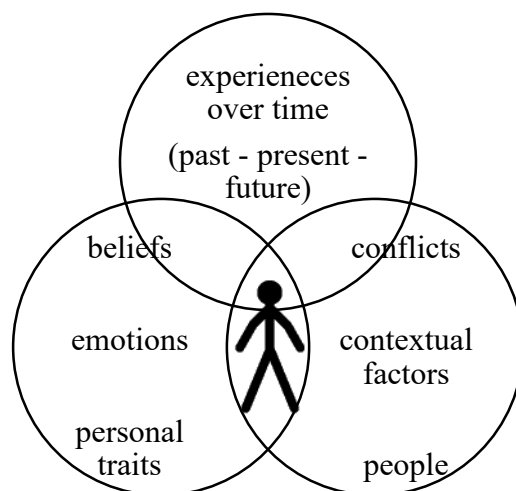
This core category supports itself through the following four subcategories that enclose the specific issues that were identified as determining the (re)construction of language teacher identity.

Valuing the Human and Social Constituents of Language Teaching. Interpretations of teachers' stories revealed one of the most significant issues that serves as a source for understanding the process related to identity construction is related to what participants consider meaningful and purposeful teaching. Meaningful and purposeful teaching is nurtured by the human and social dimension that favors how they feel and what they do as language teachers. During the three stages of their narrative practice, teachers declared how this dimension is a key referent for their understanding as language teachers.

They (re)construct themselves as language teachers by determining the extent of their practices in human and social aspects. For the three stages of the writing process, they emphasized how past and present experiences have been permeated by an added value that demands humanized pedagogy and social awareness-raising actions. Likewise, their "imagined identities" addressed the desire of being understood as language teachers whose *<being>* and *<doing>* are driven by the human and social constituents of language teaching.

A participant who will be referred as *Florence* started her story with a very reflective stance toward the way she started the process of understanding herself as a language teacher. She evoked her first teaching experiences that led to interesting insights about how she began her process of identity (re)construction. The following excerpt includes a detailed reflection that shows what teaching means to her as well as what it means to be a language teacher.

> When I was in 6th semester of my undergraduate program I started my practicum as an
> English teacher at different public schools, I had the opportunity to teach on primary and

high school. At first, it was not easy to place theory into practice, I realized that it was not only about teaching a language, but teaching through language. I found some students who were not interested in learning English at all, so I had to think of... why should they do learn English? How could I make it significant for them? After that, I started working at different private schools, there I found that despite the differences in context (economical, familiar, school resources, class schedule, and more) the students faced similar difficulties in regards to the English. So, once again I reflected upon my practices as a teacher and how those practices have an impact that goes further than our classrooms. The necessity of understanding immediate contexts, our students' desires and society requirements results in more significant learning practices. I learned that our purposes as teachers must go beyond the language teaching, I faced the real impact of our work in our students' life, in their families, in society. [*sic*] (Florence, Retrospection)

In this way, Florence accounted for her first steps toward discovering the sense of herself as a language teacher. She highlighted the fact of being a teacher who can truly embrace students' needs and interests within real, meaningful experiences. Besides that, teaching context particularities made her aware of language teaching beyond a mere instrumental activity. She positioned herself for the first time as a social agent to empower and impact students' lives by means of transformative practices.

In fact, in her narrative interview, she developed the idea of meaningful and purposeful teaching. She declared that language teaching must create valuable connections with students' life purposes. As she expressed, her actions as a language teacher seek to encourage student self-reflection and understanding to develop a sense of purpose that adds meaning to their lives. The

following narrative interview excerpt includes the reflection questions she used to support such a view:

> Siempre soy como muy enfática en que, bueno, igual más allá del nivel que uno tenga como profesor de lengua, pues, es también poder involucrar a los estudiantes en un ejercicio que sea realmente significativo y para mí ¿qué es significativo? que genere un impacto pues más allá de simplemente, si, puedo presentar un examen, no sé un IELTS, un First Certificate, sino que realmente reflexione frente a ¿cómo va impactar eso en su vida?, ¿cuál es el propósito?, o sea ¿para qué siente él o ella que está ahí dentro de esa aula?…[sic] (Florence, Narrative Interview)

In the same vein, a participant who will be referred to as *Alejandra* declared how her first teaching experience became a valuable referent for understanding herself as a language teacher. In her writing, she shared the positive feelings she experienced and in which she found the value of being a language teacher. In fact, the positive feelings that she referred to as *satisfaction* and *reward* are displayed as essential during her other stories. She can be considered a language teacher who constantly builds herself in regards to emotional factors associated with her teaching practices.

> My second event was when I had my first teaching experience. By that time I was studying, I was in the fifth semester, so I had the chance of being an assistant teacher in a course for university students. The course took two months, and during that time, I tried to be super creative with the way I made the students understand the topics; they really enjoyed coming to class, and I started to feel something close to satisfaction. At that moment, I knew I wanted to teach, and I discovered how teaching gave me a rewarding sensation that I could compare to happiness. ([*sic*] (Alejandra, Retrospection)

This piece of Alejandra's story is a key referent for her process of identity construction. During her accounts for present and future insights, she constantly attached great importance to genuine practices in which she can experience positive feelings that validate a humanized language teaching practice. Such positive feelings arose as a result of valuing students' interests and by positioning herself as a creator of meaningful language teaching and learning environments.

During her narrative interview, she linked the above part of her story to support the awareness of how being a language teacher gives her possibilities for knowledge co-construction through a humanized education. Alejandra constantly refers to genuine feelings such as happiness and rejoicing that provide significance to her actions as a language teacher. Indeed, she expressed that those feelings experienced have determined her essence as a language teacher and in her search for sense:

> Yo me acuerdo cómo me sentía en esos momentos y yo me sentía como, esto es lo que yo quiero hacer, esto me da valía. Esto es una manera de validar el hecho de que no me equivoque escogiendo esto que quería hacer porque puedo hacer felices a otros a través del descubrimiento que ellos hacen del conocimiento que pueden desarrollar y yo era ese puente que se los hacía muchos más amable. Para mi valía el hecho de que, oiga esto si tiene sentido, hacer esto si tiene sentido y se puede hacer de la manera más disfrutable posible. Si, si fueron épocas muy bonitas, fue un tiempo cortico, pero fue un tiempo bien significativo y, de hecho, le dio mucho sentido a ejercer la profesión posteriormente. [sic] (Alejandra, Narrative Interview)

Similarly, a participant who will be referred as *Alice* addressed a significant reflection during her prospection stage through which she recognized how the valuing of the human and

social factors is a source for her understanding of who she is as a language teacher. She considered herself someone who exerts influence on others, which demands a sense of responsibility and commitment.

> For my professional projection, I demand to be training and studying to be at the forefront of what is in keeping with the time; always taking into account that those who are in the distance are people who are in future professional training processes, which makes me In an example to follow, and for me, it is always important to project my work with the responsibility and commitment that each of my students deserves.
>
> My projection as a virtual teacher is clearly marked in my way of being, of doing, of learning, I am committed to my profession and with those who semester after semester, we share a training space, in which I always give my best so that they Become excellent professionals. [*sic*] (Alice, Prospection)

Alice expanded that insight through the narrative interview. After she recounted how she began her journey as a distance and virtual language teacher, she referred to the facts that she considers meaningful in a language teaching process. Thus, she does not relate her actions to the transfer of knowledge, but as an opportunity for mutual growth. Once again, she acknowledges the influence she exerts on students to reflect on the formative and social impact of the process, as shown in this representative excerpt:

> Yo siempre pienso en que lo que yo hago tiene que no ser para cumplir la clase o para cumplirme con una nota, sino que últimamente también he llevado al aula a reflexionar que el inglés no se puede quedar con solo que esté en el aula, las cuatro paredes que tenemos, sino que trascienda. Y ahí es el caso en el que pienso y les digo a las estudiantes

de licenciatura, siempre pensarlo en función que ellas van a aplicarlo en sus contextos, no

solo laboral sino familiar. [sic] (Alice, Narrative Interview)

Through this subcategory, participants illustrated noteworthy theoretical elements in the

process associated with language teacher identity (re)construction. Barkhuizen (2017)

highlighted the fact that LTIs involve a permanent sense-making activity around cognitive,

social, emotional, ideological, and historical issues. Participants in this study showed how they

seek to constantly make sense of such issues through meaningful and purposeful teaching. In this

manner, interaction among these factors is a source for identity (re)construction. Borg (2006)

documented the relevance of the linkage between what teachers do, think, and know. Thus,

participants in this study co-constructed their selves in interrelation from significant experiences

over time. Finally, as expressed by Duff (2014), identity (re)construction is not an isolated

process, but demands recognition of personal and socio-educational contexts. Hence, participants

showed how their LTIs are socially-constructed by acknowledging the relevance of people and

settings within the process.

Managing Conflict and Tensions through Negotiation. This subcategory exposes a

significant issue about how exposure to new practices and challenges impact the way language

teachers (re)construct themselves. Teaching experiences addressing confrontations regarding

contextual factors, interactions, teaching modes, and materials, among others, provide scenarios

for identity construction. Participants shared relevant information by making sense of their

present experiences attached to an alternative setting: distance and virtual. However, they were

able to connect such reflections with previous experiences as well as future projections as

language teachers.

This part of the analysis acknowledged the manner in which teachers' stories revealed their ongoing struggles and tensions derived from contextual factors each teaching experience demands. In this regard, they made special emphasis on the transition they experienced in becoming distance and virtual language teachers. Dealing with issues in this setting have meant new understandings of their actions. Hence, being embedded in alternative environments where they are challenged and confronted leads to a process of negotiating their identities as language teachers.

In one of her stories, Florence started with experiences that had been significant in her journey of becoming a distance and virtual language teacher. Something remarkable is the fact that she addressed what I called a "contextual factor analysis" to explain the challenges she has dealt with. One of these challenges was related to the excessive number of students that she had to manage and that conflicted with the student-centered learning process she favored. In fact, at one point in her narrative, she questioned the quality of education in virtual environments, referring to disengagement with human and social constituents of language teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, Florence showed how these tensions and conflicts lead to negotiation processes where language teachers address such confrontations by making decisions and choices that lead them to find consistency between who they are and what they do as teachers. The following excerpt helps to illustrate this idea:

> I can try my best every single class; I try to make my students feel I know who they are, despite the huge number of students. From my personal point of view, I have found that when we see them and make them feel like a number, they lose their interest and barely do things to get a grade; but, when we show real interest, at least try to identify them by

their particularities, good or bad, they may feel pressure or motivated, to be better

professionals. [*sic*] (Florence, Interpretation)

In this way, Florence went through a significant negotiation process that fit her beliefs

about language teaching and learning. This negotiation activity emerged out of the reflection of

her experiences and became a fact when she took actions that conveyed interactions between her

understanding of herself as a language teacher and the particularities of the setting. In the above

excerpt, she shared the actions she implemented to cope up with the demands of context while

being guided by her own teaching principles.

In another part of her story, she envisioned herself as a dreamer even while

acknowledging the complex contextual factors associated with the modality, such as

connectivity, economic issues, and emotional factors, among others. Still, she makes an effort to

be a better language teacher. Florence handles her struggles by making sense of who she is and

what she does as a language teacher. The recognition of the transformative power of teaching

goes beyond conflicts with contextual factors. The way her "*being*" and "*doing*" impact others'

lives provides a sense of encouragement in the challenges of this particular setting.

That is what I think behind the screen, I know I may sound like a dreamer, and I have

been pushed back by things like students having problems with connection, access to

computer, distance from the places where they live, economical difficulties, emotional

difficulties, they are even touch by the silent war they live everyday… However, as

teacher, you have to learn to deal with this without being too high or too low…

I would say… that I try, I still try to be a better teacher every time...I am still in that tight

rope, in which I do not want to re-victimize my students but either ignore their realities.

Just try to do my job while I give as much as I can offer them. [*sic*] (Florence, Interpretation)

In this connection, a key issue to highlight from Florence's narrative interview was her account of what she meant by declaring, "*I do not want to re-victimize my students, but either ignore their realities*". Despite the fact that the distance and virtual modality entails difficulties, she expressed that the teacher is called on to empower students and capture their interest by making the language learning process more bearable. With this in mind, she strengthens the idea that supports this subcategory: confrontation involving conflict management.

Digamos cuando yo digo en ese caso, por ejemplo, de no re-victimize es porque tampoco la idea es que el hecho de que sea difícil, digamos generar esas prácticas, cierto, entonces genere esa sensación en los mismos estudiantes de decir, no voy a poder, es difícil, y que finalmente eso los lleve a ellos a abandonar muchas veces, porque pasa muchas veces, cierto. El hecho de que uno como docente simplemente se centre en que hay que enseñarles eso a como dé lugar, no, o sea también cómo se supone que se puede manejar dicha herramienta y mire a ver cómo la flexibiliza, para que realmente le impacte al estudiante…[*sic*] (Florence, Narrative Interview)

As Florence did, Alejandra described the way teachers encounter a discrepancy between feelings, beliefs ("*being*"), and actions ("*doing*"). She exposes her feelings toward the challenges of being a distance and virtual teacher. She is able to determine how she experienced discouraging feelings regarding her teaching practice as she questions issues related to excessive amounts of students and unsatisfactory evaluation processes. Her narrative shows how language teacher identity is a process that is linked to emotions and feelings about the teachers' own understanding of what is significant or not in a language teaching practice.

However, the number of students was excessive, and the evaluation process could not be done in a satisfactory way. It was impossible to monitor all students, and this situation was clearly frustrating. This was the negative point of the modality because despite there are many students who barely do something (in terms of assignments and learning), some others really make an effort, want to learn, and wait for some feedback on their assignments. Therefore, I considered it disrespectful, but it certainly was not possible to make it. Nothing is perfect in any field, that is clear, and there are some issues we have to deal with in this "modality." For instance, understanding de diverse student's "realities," the poor previous experiences learning English, their lack of motivation, for some of them having to learn English as a third language and even being struggling with Spanish and so on. [*sic*] (Alejandra, Interpretation)

During Alejandra's prospection, she developed her sense of resistance and frustration towards the challenges of the alternative setting. She wrote a pure and thoughtful text where she was able to confront herself as a distance and virtual language teacher based on the difficulties of the context.

I must say it is quite necessary to work more on assuring minimum standards for learning a foreign language. This, for example, regarding the excessive number of students in some cases, a situation that entails short student monitoring and, as a consequence, unknown learning processes even for the teachers. It is important to highlight that not in every institution, virtual language courses work the same; however, that has been quite my recurring experience. I do not see myself being a language teacher for so long, I have decided I need to make a difference in "the world", in my world and in what it is around it by doing something that represents a feeling of fulfillment, something that gives me

peace, and allows me build happiness day by day. When I think of working as a virtual

teacher, **the sense of being in a comfort zone comes to my mind**, a way of getting a

good payment by doing something I already know how to do, but honestly, I am not

capable to find sense in continue doing a job that I cannot be comfortable enough with.

[*sic*] (Alejandra, Prospection)

At the end of the excerpt, she struggled to find a sense of herself as a distance and virtual

language teacher. She highlighted the following statement: "*When I think of working as a virtual*

*teacher, **the sense of being in a comfort zone comes to my mind***". Alejandra's negotiation

process is determined by ensuring coherence between her beliefs and her actions. The comfort

zone she referred to can be related to the absence of meaning she finds in her actions. She does

not want to understand herself as a mere instrumental agent –on the contrary, she projects herself

as a transformative language teacher.

During Alejandra's narrative interview, she shared a touching moment that revealed her

feelings towards the conflicting situation she experienced as a distance teacher. She provided

details about how she encountered herself with a feeling of detachment. She highlights conflict

issues that revealed her struggles and self-confrontations in the (re)construction of her identity as

a language teacher. The following part of the interview unfolds as very genuine and moving

testimony:

Precisamente eso fue lo que paso, en ese proceso de descubrir todos los pros, pero

también los contras que tiene este tipo de modalidad, yo creo que básicamente fue como

el cuestionamiento de, digamos, parto de esa primera experiencia que acabamos de

mencionar, esa sensación de felicidad, del valor que implicaba o que representaba mi

quehacer en la vida de otras personas. Ya en la modalidad virtual, digamos que algo

interesante era el hecho de la cobertura, de poder llegar a una cantidad de personas, pero

en el momento en el que yo sentí que ya no tenía esa capacidad de impactar la vida de los

demás, ya no existía esa conexión con la sensación de felicidad por lo que yo estaba

haciendo, porque no sentía que eso se estuviera cumpliendo realmente. Sí, no sentía que

todo lo que podía yo hacer realmente lo estaban recibiendo los otros y había una

realimentación de eso que yo estaba ofreciendo, porque ni siquiera estaba yo en la

capacidad de hacer un seguimiento juicioso y decir si están aprendiendo o no están

aprendiendo, sino que la cantidad era absurda y era simplemente hacer un ejercicio

supremamente mecánico de asignar una calificación por algo que enviaban y ya, a eso se

estaba limitando mi quehacer en ese momento. Entonces, claro ahí hubo una

desconexión, hubo un antes y un después y ahí se rompió algo. [sic] (Alejandra, Narrative

Interview)

Alice shared a valuable insight about a key turning point in her life as a language teacher.

In one of her stories, she pointed out: "*When I began to be an English teacher in the distance

virtual modality, I generated changes in my planning and teaching methodology*". Such

understanding serves to exemplify how language teacher identity is (re)constructed through

experiences of renewal. For her, the encounter with a new setting involves reflection around how

to handle the particular needs of the context and finding ways of critically adapting to context

needs. The excerpt below accounts for such an interpretation:

Cuando ya tengo la oportunidad de estar en la virtualidad, primero, tengo que tener muy

claro a quien le estoy enseñando, tengo que tener muy claro la modalidad en la que estoy

enseñando y tengo que tener muy claro siempre, por eso lo escribí, a pesar de la distancia,

o sea, no los veo, mi explicación debe ser tan clara que en el otro lado me comprendan,

entonces, pues para mí la finalidad siempre es que el estudiante aprenda…Por eso

siempre, hago una lectura del contexto, y sobretodo, creo que fue muy claro al iniciar en

la virtualidad, en dónde estaba, con qué población estaba trabajando, entonces claro

cuando llego a la institución y me explican las características de los estudiantes, entonces,

siento que es importante partir de los contextos de los estudiantes para poder proyectar la

didáctica, la pedagogía que se va utilizar. [sic] (Alice, Narrative Interview)

The negotiation activity developed through this subcategory represented the idea of

language teacher identity as a process involving decision-making around conflict and tensions. It

attempts to illustrate the concepts of "negotiated" and "designated" identities, as delineated by

Martel (2012). Tensions and conflicts emerge around new role expectations and particular

conditions that defy teachers' identities. Participants illustrated how such confrontations served

as a means to (re)shape by enhancing their critical sense, which takes the form of resistance

actions. A similar view was expressed by White (2009) in acknowledging the conflictive nature

of language teacher identity. The conflict arises out of teachers' exposure to a diverse set of

methodologies. Participants in this study experienced transitions from face-to-face to distance

and virtual contexts, and were able to refer situated reflections involving choices, decisions, and

attitudes. Therefore, this subcategory also contributes to demonstrating how confrontational

actions benefit the process of teacher's professional development, as stated by Golombek (2010).

Teachers as Analytical, Innovative, and Transformative Learners. This subcategory

attempts to show the teachers' remarkable characteristics that became a source of knowledge for

understanding their stories' insights. The three participants showed how their identity

(re)construction is driven by their sense of analysis, innovation, and transformation. Throughout

their narrative practice, they addressed their reflections around those three components.

First, teachers as analytical learners (re)constructed themselves through reflection. They described their experiences by reconstructing the meaningful elements that influenced their stories as language teachers. In this sense, they drew conclusions on how such interrelated experiences have become sources for self-development and identity. For each of the stages, they revealed reflections that connected to who they are as language teachers.

For instance, Florence's story reveals how she constantly reflects on the challenges derived from new experiences. At the beginning of her interpretation (present experiences), she introduces herself as an analytical teacher who embarks on permanent reflection in the improvement of her practices. These reflections are based on her human-oriented view of learning that provides her with a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

> I would start by saying that since I became a virtual teacher I have become a better teacher, challenges, good and bad experiences had made me reflect over and over again on how can I get closer to my students. This is not only a matter of knowing a subject, it is about how to reach your goals, curriculum goals and students goals… same as face to face teaching, virtual teaching depends on how you learn to deal with things that may go wrong without losing your students interest, attention and respect. I am pretty sure there are a lot of things we do not think about when teaching, until we face them. [*sic*]
>
> (Florence, Interpretation)

Certainly, Florence's reflection gives an account of what she conceives as a *constant learning process*. In one of her stories, she expressed: "*Personal and professional experience has shown me that teaching is a constant learning process about practices and the effect of those*". This interpretation helps to portray herself as an analytical, innovative, and transformative

language teacher. She is eager to grow and learn by valuing the transformative power of experiences in the (re)construction of her LTI, as expressed in this excerpt:

> Cuando hablo de ese constante proceso de aprendizaje, lidiar con seres humanos es aprender a identificar muchas cosas que uno en la teoría pues realmente puede ver de manera superficial, en la práctica uno con 40 estudiantes, en la virtualidad con 200, 300 estudiantes, o sea, generar esas conexiones, identificar ese tipo de particularidades no es tan sencillo, en la distancia muchísimo menos, pero bueno ese es el proceso que siempre creo que está ahí latente y, de una u otra manera, todas las enseñanzas que uno recibe ahí, obviamente lo fortalecen a uno como docente. [*sic*] (Florence, Narrative Interview)

In the same manner, Alice's story tells how reflection determines the professional development process. She analyses and evaluates the needs of her teaching scenarios to develop changes and improvements in her teaching. This fact is highly attached to the innovative factor that is developed further in the text. Something remarkable from this piece of Alice's story is the way she connects previous and present experiences. Thus, her considerations about evolving practices derived from experiences in different scenarios have raised her awareness of who she wants to be as a language teacher.

> Finally, the experience of being a virtual and face-to-face teacher has allowed me to understand that each teaching space presents different needs, which makes me reflect that as a teacher I must always be attentive to innovate in my pedagogical practices depending on the academic space where I am, and that being a teacher, for me, means that I must be at the forefront of the changes that academic life presents and even more if it is teaching a foreign language which requires a lot of elements and skills that must be developed through each class. [*sic*] (Alice, Interpretation)

Another relevant feature that was identified throughout the teachers' stories was the interest in pursuing innovative practices that complied with context requirements as well as teachers' underlying beliefs. Teachers, as innovative learners, understand the evolving nature of their language identities by being aware of the importance of addressing new challenges regarding education. They develop a critical and assertive approach toward their actions as language teachers.

To start with, Alice's story developed a very meaningful prospection as a result of reflections regarding her past and present experiences. She introduces herself as an analytical, innovative language teacher who is constantly learning and improving practices. Her narrative states the need for taking informed action towards language teaching and learning processes. She declares she does not want to become a passive agent; oppositely, she aims to be a creator and generator of meaningful learning experiences.

> My professional projection is aimed at constant training and research to improve, learn and innovate in my pedagogical practices. I am interested in being constantly learning in order to improve the training of my students. For me it is important to keep in mind that students in training are people and that they should receive from me all the best.
> Being a teacher of virtual English leads me to reflect, that the design of the material, the planning and organization of each class and an excellent explanation are not enough to generate learning, or that I finally think that I have already done everything.
> I have always thought and I think in the future that I cannot fall into being a professional who is only interested in doing the job, in repeating classes. That is why I in each class innovate and restructure the classes. I know that I teach the same content, but I like to

innovate and investigate how my students learn to design and improve each class. [*sic*]

(Alice, Prospection)

Alice expanded her insights during the narrative interview. She feels that being analytical and innovative means discovering your true essence as a human being. The need to constantly learn and transform teaching practices turns out to be a meaningful source for her identity (re)construction. She acknowledges the commitment and responsibility needed to boost students' interest in learning a foreign language. As expressed in the following excerpt, she aims to have a mighty impact on learners' lives:

En parte eso es de mi personalidad, no asumo el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera y, más aún, apoyada tanto con la tecnología de hacer situaciones o ejercicios repetitivos. También, pienso que aprender el idioma, o bueno también estamos en la función de hacer que al otro le guste, que al otro le guste la lengua extranjera…Pienso que, es gracias a eso Lei, a que cada clase es diferente, cada práctica que se hace es, depende el tema, y pues la idea es esa, que vaya más allá de solo aprender la lengua no, sino que se proyecte por qué no con su profesión bilingüe. [sic] (Alice, Narrative Interview)

Similarly, Florence's story shows her interest in continually improving her teaching practices. She sees herself as a lifelong learner who aims to address the challenges of virtual teaching. Also, she expresses a desire to be an active and purposeful teacher guided by the proper use of technology and the acceptance of context needs.

I expect to keep on learning all that comes with virtual teaching; so far I can say that I have learnt how to use technology in my favor, to make a more interesting class, to identify students' progress or fails, for instance plagiarism, and to interact with my students. I want to find real solutions to deal with the difficulties we face every day, there

are multiple factors that are not considered ´till they happen. So we need to be prepare

and think of plan A and B in case this or that happens. [*sic*] (Florence, Prospection)

Lastly, teachers, as transformative learners recognize the power of teaching for impacting

and transforming others' lives. Through their stories, they showed interest in creating meaningful

experiences beyond the language itself. Such meaningful experiences are driven by the desire to

make a difference through their actions. They constantly aimed to understand themselves as

social agents willing to make significant contributions toward the human and social

circumstances they influence.

For example, in Florence's prospection story, she expresses her desire to continue her

journey as a distance and virtual language teacher. As a result of her previous experiences, she

has become more aware of how context and people are impacted by her actions as a language

teacher. In this regard, she realizes the significance of taking actions that contribute to the

bettering of people's lives.

Therefore, I would like to become a wise and more experienced teacher; I find a purpose

on teaching every day, so I want my students to find their own, their own reasons to be in

my class, bearing in mind their professional but human dimension too. That is why I

would like to continue living this experience as a virtual language teacher. This

profession has gave me the chance to become a more aware and responsible social agent.

[*sic*] (Florence, Prospection)

Alejandra considers the driving force that defines herself as an analytical and innovative

teacher relies on a deep sense of satisfaction. During her narrative interview, she recalled a past

experience that has permeated her being as language teacher. People from her past academic

experiences have exerted great influence on the kind of language teacher she wants to be. Thus, considerations about how others touch and transform a life are persistent.

> Yo creo que como el punto clave de la cuestión es que vuelva algo que mencione al comienzo y es el hecho de la satisfacción que me genera el sentir que puedo tocar las vidas de otras personas. Porque en algún momento, no sé si fue en alguno de los escritos que te envié, te hablaba de que en la universidad tuve dos profesores que fueron un referente fuerte para mí, pensar en el impacto que ellos generaron en mi vida, que hasta este momento de mi vida yo me acuerdo de ellos y los evoco con mucho respeto. Para mí, ellos dos fueron muy importantes al llegar al punto de verme, yo, en su lugar. En la medida en que yo sentí como tocada mi vida y transformada mi vida y mi formación académica, ser ellos ese referente para yo querer estar en esa posición en el futuro. [sic] (Alejandra, Narrative Interview)

This subcategory supports the understanding of the (re)construction of LTIs as a process enhanced by teachers' analysis of their actions as language teachers. As White (2017) highlights, teachers must develop "*critically adaptive learning*". Such a concept found expression in participants' narratives. Participants expressed their need to constantly see themselves as promoters of significant and authentic actions. In fact, it was evident how experiences over time have brought up challenges leading to new insights about who they are and who they want to be as language teachers. The concept of agency proposed by Giroux (2000) is also depicted. Agency is the ability to make choices and act in favor of social change. Participants gave an account of how their search for innovative and transformative practices provides them an opportunity to intervene in social change. They constantly refer to how their actions are informed decisions

regarding learners and context needs. Hence, the (re)construction of LTIs is driven by a sense of

analysis and critical learning.

      The Transformative Power of Storying in the (Re)construction of LTI. This

subcategory emerged as a response to how storying became a meaningful practice for exerting

teachers' agency and empowerment. As Elbaz-Luwisch (2005) states, "Representing our

experience, and that of teachers, in text, is seen to be a challenging, complex and creative

endeavor, open to revision and questioning at all times; and, in the process, we not only revise

the text but the revised text may create new experience" (p. 38). In this regard, teachers' stories

in this study comprise a source for (re)constructing experiences through meaningful writing.

      Thus, writing was not understood as a merely informative activity; teachers were told the

larger purpose of each of the stories. Such purposes adopted the form of narrative frames that

oriented the reflective tone of the stories. According to Barkhuizen (2008), narrative frames are

useful to guide and support the writer in the elaboration of stories. Participants from this study

developed their stories by following the reflections embedded in the questions that supported the

narrative frames.

      An important issue addressed during narrative interviews was that it was the first time for

them to be involved in a narrative practice activity. They expressed that storying about

themselves gave them the possibility to (re)construct themselves through situated experiences. In

this process, they acknowledged significant connections between their past, present, and future

that have contributed to their understanding of who they are and who they want to become as

language teachers.

      The transformative power of storying in the (re)construction of LTI arised as crucial to

the study. It seeks to elucidate the genuine impact that a reflective writing process can have in

the (re)construction of language teacher identity. Florence, Alice, and Alejandra increased self-awareness as well as developed a critical sense towards themselves by means of engaging in narrative practice. Selected excerpts from the narrative interviews aim at voicing such experiences.

To start, Florence emphasized the need to become involved in reflection practices to facilitate self-learning. She acknowledges how the identification of significant experiences and their connections over time has become a source for understanding herself as a language teacher. She stated the self-reflection activity promoted by the narrative practice led her to be aware of the process of self-transformation. Her valuable insights regarding this issue are stated through the following excerpt:

> Yo creo que esto es algo que uno realmente muchas veces no hace, hacer ese ejercicio de retrospección, introspección, y demás. Pues muchas veces uno no tiene la oportunidad de hacer ese ejercicio reflexivo y pues, de cierta manera, es gratificante porque uno ve que también ha generado esos cambios que en algún momento uno se propuso y que precisamente, como lo decía ahí en el escrito, a pesar de ciertas circunstancias muchas veces es el sistema académico, bueno, hay múltiples factores que uno termina por encontrar y que aprende a tener en cuenta después durante esos procesos. El ejercicio es valioso en el sentido de poder conectar todo ese proceso que uno ha vivido ya como docente, porque a veces se le pasa uno el tiempo y voltea uno a mirar y ya lleva uno como diez años trabajando en lo mismo y uy, a qué horas pasaron diez años ya desde que por primera vez empecé a trabajar en este campo. Sí, eso le ayuda a uno a ver cómo ha sido ese proceso de auto transformación también. [sic] (Florence, Narrative Interview)

In the same vein, Alice recognized the value of undertaking reflection as the basis for the (re)construction of her teacher identity. She acknowledges the fact that, by becoming aware of her transformative process in teaching, the understanding of who she is has matured. She describes how self-reflection reveals the significance of her assemblage of experiences over time. Her voice can be heard through this excerpt:

Uno no se está reflexionando, uno no está recordando, sino uno está viviendo día tras día y en el afán de cumplir con tantas cosas uno no toma una pausa y dice, oiga, y yo soy lo que soy ¿por qué?...Siento que el trabajo de escribir lo que soy, lo que he logrado es significativo porque también le doy valor también al esfuerzo que he hecho porque no ha sido fácil…[Los tres textos] me impactan en los tres sentidos, considero que fue un ejercicio bueno, bueno para mí, porque escribir sobre uno mismo no lo hace uno en su cotidianidad. Entonces, estuvo interesante, muy reflexivo, siempre quise escribirte con toda la honestidad del caso. [sic] (Alice, Narrative Interview)

Finally, Alejandra revealed how the writing activity became an act of liberation. As she expressed, she went through a process of self-questioning in the course of the three writing stages. Such reflection activity was linked to the search for meaning she longed to find. Her identity as a teacher was challenged as a result of the discrepancies she experienced regarding the distance and virtual modality. Her reflections entailed a set of personal and professional issues she questioned at that point in her life. This situation illustrates the power of writing as a liberating and transformative task.

Yo creo que fue bastante valioso para mi hacer el ejercicio, más allá de que fuera por colaborarte, por hacer parte del proceso de investigación de tu proyecto, más allá de eso, el ejercicio de sentarme pues a escribir y a pensar en ese tipo de preguntas que a veces

uno menciona, comenta, comparte, pero realmente no ahonda, no se detiene, fue bien

interesante. Al comienzo, recordar, esa mirada hacia atrás en la vida y recordar como esas

cosas agradables, entonces fue bastante significativo y ahí se empezó a abrir el camino

para lo que venía después. Ya en el segundo escrito, como que el hecho de llevar al papel

todos esos cuestionamientos que estaba teniendo en ese momento, fue un ejercicio

bastante liberador y me llevó a pararme en un punto que me hizo re cuestionar un montón

de cosas. [sic] (Alejandra, Narrative Interview)

This subcategory opens a path to embracing the need for a self-reflection process for the

(re)construction of LTI. Writing voices teachers' awareness of who they are and who they want

to be as language teachers under a historical and socially-constructed frame. As Borg (2014)

points out, narration allows the teacher to make sense of experiences and re-shape them. Storying

through narratives involves a metacognition process through which teachers find ways of re-

signifying. In fact, Ramanathan (2002) noted that nurturing the meta-awareness process lays out

a path to become critical and proactive educators. Participants showed how the process of being

part of a narrative practice meant an opportunity for acknowledging just such a critical sense.

Lastly, Freire (1970) envisioned the need for teachers' empowerment as a process of discovery.

Narratives benefit such a process. As expressed by one of the participants, being involved in the

narrative practice was a liberating act.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

This qualitative research study aimed to describe and interpret issues that emerged from the process involved in (re)constructing language teacher identity through narrative practice. The section provides an answer to the research question that guided and centered the study: What does distance and virtual English teachers' narrative practice reveal about the (re)construction of their language teacher identities? Likewise, the achievement of the research objectives will be shown by highlighting the significant conclusions resulting from the discussion of the core category and subcategories.

First, storying about the past, present, and imagined future is a rich resource for promoting introspective writing practices where teachers can make sense of themselves while interpreting experiences that have permeated their experience as teachers. Participants (re)shaped their identities as a result of their ongoing critical activity in the form of permanent reflection and negotiations toward their teaching practices.

The research concluded that a key issue that enacts the construction and negotiation of language teacher identity is the willingness to ensure coherence between who they are and what they do. Such coherence is mediated by a permanent desire for experiencing meaningful and purposeful teaching. As stated in the first category, language teachers find consistency through the interconnectedness of "*being*" and "*doing*." In this way, they build and rebuild identity through the *emotional*, *thinking*, and *doing* components that endorse their experiences.

The first category demonstrated how underlying emotions and beliefs embedded in teachers' experiences are a fundamental source for interpretation of who they are. Teachers are emotional beings that strive to make sense of themselves based on their interactions with

contexts and people. Through feelings guided by their beliefs regarding a humanizing pedagogy that values the human and social assets of the teaching practice, they construct their identity. Their stories helped demystify the dehumanization usually associated with distance and virtual teaching and learning practices.

In the same regard, the first category legitimized the teachers need for finding social value as part of their understanding of who they are. The analysis of context and people provided them with opportunities to raise social awareness. They (re)construct themselves as social agents of change and embrace this within their teaching performance. They constantly referred to how meaningful it is to impact other lives. Very often, the three participants wrote of their concerns about socio-cultural issues when storying about their experiences.

Furthermore, this study determined the significance of teachers' tensions and struggles as part of the (re)construction of their LTIs. Through introspective practice, teachers exposed and reflected on the confrontations and struggles they deal with, especially when transitioning to alternative settings. When they first started their journeys as distance and virtual teachers, the demand for addressing the requirements of context (institutions, modality) developed into personal and professional struggles. Consequently, they found themselves in a two-way relationship where context determined their identity as language teachers, and they looked for their own ways to determine their identity.

The study also demonstrated that professional development is highly attached to language identity construction. The teachers' personal traits (analytical, innovative, transformative) led to significant ways in which they determined the meaning of their experiences. They became involved in sense-making practices around these three components. They shared genuine

reflections around their willingness to be understood as active agents of development as well as promoters of humanized and socially embedded teaching experiences.

Finally, teachers' accounts of their experience as storytellers proved that reflective writing is a meaningful source for understanding their experiences, especially when asked to construct them based on a historical perspective. Teachers engaged in such activities developed self-aware writing strategies to describe and interpret their introspective practice.

Limitations

Limitations regarding the development of this study are related to time issues around the writing activities. The writing of stories is a very introspective activity that cannot be forced. Teachers always showed a willingness to take part in this study; however, their multiple activities and responsibilities led to a shortage of time. As a researcher, it was necessary to handle this situation in the best way possible since the teachers made a great effort to write and share their stories.

Considerations for Further Research

Beyond the academic tone of this paper, I want to thank my participants for their willingness to get involved in this process, recognizing the fact that writing is a very introspective activity that must be highly valued when shared with others. Also, I thank them for their patience through the process of collecting their stories. Their stories have a significant place in this document, and I feel a great sense of admiration for each of their experiences.

I want to encourage distance and virtual language teachers to write about their experiences and find ways of creating academic support networks where discussion about concerns can be analyzed in a collective way. In fact, the idea of study groups in which teachers can embrace their insights about the way they (re)construct themselves is an extended invitation

as a result of my study. Also, I hope that future research in this field considers alternative ways

of collecting teachers' stories. Writing is a meaningful activity. I believe we can use other

alternative instruments that support an innovative source of data collection.

To close this chapter, I include a list of noteworthy topics that would be of significance

for further narrative embedded studies.

1. (Re)construction of LTI and the exposure to alternative practices.

2. (Re)construction of LTI and the role of conflict situations (teaching modes, teaching
   scenarios, teaching material, etc.).

3. (Re)construction of LTI and the impact of co-constructed narrative practices (teacher
   communities, study groups, etc.).

4. (Re)construction of LTI and the factors that facilitate negotiation activity and/or a sense
   of resistance.

References

Alvarado, M., Neira, M., & Westmacott, A. (2019). Collaborative reflective practice: Its

influence on pre- service EFL teachers' emerging professional identities. *Iranian Journal

of Language Teaching Research, 7*(3), 53-70.

Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.). (2017). *Reflections on Language Teacher Identity Research*. Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315643465

Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Narrative research in language teaching and learning. *Language

Teaching, 47*(4), 450-466. doi: 10.1017/S0261444814000172

Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2013). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and

learning research*. Routledge.

Barkhuizen, G., & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experiences of

language teachers. *System, 36*(3), 372-387. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2008.02.002

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional

identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*. 107-128. 10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001.

Block, D. (2014). *Second language identities*. Bloomsbury.

Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice.* Continuum.

Bukor, E. (2011). *Exploring teacher identity: Teachers' transformative experiences of

reconstructing and re-connecting personal and professional selves* [Unpublished doctoral

dissertation]. University of Toronto.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in

qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Seabury Press.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). Public pedagogy as cultural politics: Stuart Hall and the 'crisis' of culture. *Cultural Studies, 14*(2), 341–360.

Goodwin, D., & Mora Pablo, I. (2012). *Alternative methods for undertaking qualitative research*. Universidad de Guanajuato.

Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (Eds.). (2010). *Research on second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on professional development*. Routledge.

Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (Eds.). (2002). *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge University Press.

Jovchelovitch, S., & Bauer, M. (2007). Narrative interviewing. In M.W. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 57-74). Sage.

Karimnia, A., & Zadeh, S. (2010). Book Review: Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards (Eds.). *The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Teacher Education*. Cambridge University Press.

Kolb, B. (2008). Choosing participants for qualitative research. In Kolb, B. (Ed.), *Marketing research* (pp. 107-123). Sage. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857028013.n7

Martínez García, C. A., & Osma Rozo, J. C. (2018). La "teleclase" como herramienta en la formación virtual de tecnólogos en Regencia en Farmacia. *Revista Docencia Universitaria, 19*(1), 97-108.

Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal, 47*(1), 5-23. doi:10.1177/0033688216631219

Quintero Polo, Á. H. (2016). Creating a pedagogical space that fosters the (re)construction of self through life stories of pre-service English language teachers. *HOW Journal*, *23*(2), 106-124. https://doi.org/10.19183/how.23.2.293

Salinas, D., & Ayala, M. (2018). EFL student-teachers' identity construction: A case study in Chile. *HOW Journal*, *25*(1), 33-49. https://doi.org/10.19183/how.25.1.380

Shelley, M., Murphy, L., & White, C. (2013). Language teacher development in a narrative frame: The transition from classroom to distance and blended settings. *System, 41*, 560-574.

Teng, M. (2019). Understanding teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity: Voices from four EFL student teachers. *English Teaching & Learning, 43*, 189–212 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-019-00024-3

White, C. (2017). Searching for identity in distance language teaching. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (pp. 107-113). Routledge.

White, C. (2007). Innovation and identity in distance language learning and teaching. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 97-110. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt45.0

White, C., & Ding, A. (2009). Identity and self in e-language teaching. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the l2 self* (pp. 333-349). Multilingual Matters.

Yuan, R., & Mak, P. (2018). Reflective learning and identity construction in practice, discourse and activity: Experiences of pre-service language teachers in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 74*, 205-214. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.05.009

Appendix

Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

"Towards the understanding of the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity: A Narrative

Embedded Study"

Estimado(a) colega,

Actualmente me encuentro realizando mi tesis de grado de la Maestría en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. Como parte de mi estudio, busco desarrollar una práctica narrativa con docentes de lengua (inglés) a través de la cual se logre reflexionar sobre experiencias y factores significativos relacionados con el proceso de (re) construcción de la identidad docente.

Por lo anterior, quiero invitarlo(a) de manera especial a que usted haga parte de este ejercicio de reflexión que tomará forma de escritos individuales y una entrevista. Así, se busca hacer de este ejercicio un acto de participación informado y voluntario que contribuya en la construcción de sentido de su quehacer como docente de lengua.

Finalmente, si está de acuerdo en hacer parte activa de este estudio y aceptar que la información suministrada a través de los escritos y la entrevista sea utilizada con fines exclusivamente académicos e investigativos, por favor, firmar en el espacio correspondiente. Se garantiza la privacidad total de su identidad ya que esta no será expuesta en ninguna fase del estudio.

Convencida de que esta experiencia será de crecimiento profesional mutuo, agradezco la aceptación de mi invitación.

Atentamente,

Leidy Paola Carrera Parra   **Nombre Participante:**

Licenciada en humanidades: español e inglés   **Firma Autorización:**

lpcp28@hotmail.com   **E-mail:**

Appendix B

Written Life Stories Guidelines

"*Human beings are storying creatures. We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to ourselves and to other people.*" Sikes, P. & Gale, K. (2006).

Dear colleague,

Thank you in advance for accepting my invitation to participate in this research entitled:

"*Towards the understanding of the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity: A Narrative Embedded Study*".

This qualitative research aims to describe and interpret the way language teachers (re)construct their identities when being called to progressively make sense of their academic and teaching experiences by means of narratives. As part of this guided reflection process, you are encouraged to construct three individual written life stories to explore your own past and present experiences, as well as future projections as language teacher.

Written Life Story I

This first written story is intended for **retrospection** upon experiences in previous academic and teaching settings. Keep in mind this frame:

*Place yourself back to a **significant** experience from your **academic** and **work** background that you consider has made you who **you** are as a **language teacher**.*

1. You can start by recalling and reflecting on key **people**, **places**, or meaningful **events**. If possible, talk to people or elicit your insights through a visual element. Take notes!

2. Write a narrative text that accounts for your retrospection. Feel free to write as much as you want and pay attention to contents, not to form.

3. Keep the narrative for our interview.

Written Life Story II

This second written story is intended for **interpretation** of your teaching practice as a distance and virtual language teacher. Keep in mind this frame:

*Reconstruct and reflect upon **significant** experiences that you have **lived** during your journey of*

*__becoming__ a **distance** and **virtual** language teacher.*

How these experiences have shaped you who you are as a distance and virtual language

teacher?

1. You can start by recalling and reflecting on key **people**, **places**, or meaningful **events**. If possible, talk to people or elicit your insights through a visual element. Take notes!

2. Write a narrative text that accounts for your interpretation. Feel free to write as much as you want and pay attention to contents, not to form.

3. Keep the narrative for our interview.

Written Life Story III

This third written story is intended for developing awareness of the kind of language teacher you want to be as part of your teaching **prospection**. Keep in mind this frame:

*Think and reflect about the **future professional paths** that you envision as **representative** for the*

*kind of **language teacher** you **want to be**.*

How do these future professional paths reveal your insights about the kind of language teacher

you want to be?

Do you consider that being a distance and virtual language teacher has raised your awareness

of who you want to be as a language teacher?

1. You can start by reflecting on varied future teaching settings and/or practices that might be of your interest as a language teacher.

2. Write a narrative text that accounts for your prospection. Feel free to write as much as you want and pay attention to contents, not to form.

3. Keep the narrative for our interview.

Appendix C

Written Life Stories Samples

More than significant experience, I may say experiences. When I was in 6th semester of my undergraduate program I started my practicum as an English teacher at different public schools, I had the opportunity to teach on primary and high school. At first, it was not easy to place theory into practice, I realized that it was not only about teaching a language, but teaching through language. I found some students who were not interested in learning English at all, so I had to think of... why should they do learn English? How could I make it significant for them?. After that, I started working at different private schools, there I found that despite the differences in context (economical, familiar, school resources, class schedule, and more) the students faced similar difficulties in regards to the English. So, once again I reflected upon my practices as a teacher and how those practices have an impact that goes further than our classrooms. The necessity of understanding immediate contexts, our students' desires and society requirements results in more significant learning practices. I learned that our purposes as teachers must go beyond the language teaching, I faced the real impact of our work in our students' life, in their families, in society. One may say, that is just a subject..a requirement at school, one may think that students must learn a language because global dynamics ask them to do so, but none of those reasons are intrinsic.

Additionally, in a private school I faced an special and really frustrating situation was when I had a group of 9th grade, in which there was a student with quadriplegia, at first I was told to allow him to do whatever he wanted 'cause the English Proficiency of the other students was too high, so I had to concentrate on teaching advanced grammar. So I was told to integrate him in the classroom, but not INCLUDE him in the class perse. I tried to understand better what his

condition was (I found myself it was quadriplegia, his mother did not want to talk about it).

Santiago is his name, he was there because his mother was a close friend of the principal, he had

been there for years, but I did not understand how was he taught or evaluated.

Well, it was frustrating not because of his condition, but because of others attitude, therefore, I

tried to do as much as I could, I gave him homework 'cause I saw that he understood some tasks

I assigned, we used to communicate through a tablet, so I decided to try to use it to teach him,

after some weeks I started to evaluate and explain him only during the class (because everytime I

send homework his mother did it). Well, at the end of the year he could identify basic

vocabulary and interact somehow with his classmates and me, but I still feel it was just a

temporal action, and I am pretty sure he went back to the same dynamics after I left that school.

(Florence, Retrospection)

Becoming a distance teacher has been a challenge and a completely different experience from

what I had been doing before, (working face-to-face with students, dealing with situations and

creating strategies in order to make my lessons enjoyable and memorable, and of course finding

ways to make my students understand the language).

I tried to bring some of what I used to do in the classroom and adapt it to the context, so I created

different types of presentations, and wanted to make the teleclasses as interesting as I could. I

also used videos and listening material to get students interested and involved in their learning

process. There was a good response from some of the students, some of them enjoyed learning

and they try to develop the assignments in a creative way. I knew this, through the contact I had

with some of them.

However this, the amount of students was excessive and the evaluation process could not be

done in a satisfactory way. It was impossible to monitoring all students and this situation was

clearly frustrating. This actually, was the negative point of the modality, because despite there are many students who barely do something (in terms of assignments and learning) there are some others who really make an effort, want to learn, and wait for some feedback on their assignments. Therefore, I considered it disrespectful, but it certainly was not possible to make it. Nothing is perfect in any field, that is clear, and there are some issues we have to deal with in this "modality". For instance understanding de diverse student's "realities", the poor previous experiences learning English, their lack of motivation, for some of them having to learn English as a third language and even being struggling with Spanish and so on.

Nowadays, I know we cannot make everything we would like to but, we can still make good things and our students will still take advantage of them, and of course, some of them will learn. At this very moment, I am working with more reasonable amounts of students, that means having the chance of evaluating and monitoring, as well as having more contact with them. I have to say, I like my job, I have developed the necessary strategies and I know how to do it in a correct way. I was definitely lucky to find teachers who guided me in every moment I needed it their help. I also have to say that at some point of my life I want to change my job, not because I do not like it, but because I want to explore different disciplines, and I know all this learning will be meaningful and helpful eventually.

(Alejandra, Interpretation)

My teacher training have allowed me to project my work in different fields, that is, I have been a virtual teacher teaching English and different areas of humanities. My experience I have reflected on the importance and the great responsibility, that I have during the classes, how I organize them, which material I use, and about the people who learn through my explanation.

Having the experience in English and Spanish, I have made me understand that teaching in the virtual modality goes beyond the language used, it takes commitment and responsibility for both parties, that is, student and teacher must do the work for the same objective, "the learning". Virtual education opens a path to think of me as a teacher, since it is important to think about the methodology and teaching I use: it is not the same when students are listening and sees you directly, when you are teaching mediated by technology. Then I have reflected that pedagogical practices change, since communication is much more valuable, since it must be so clear and simple for a virtual student; to learn through the explanations that are made and more when it comes to a foreign language, which requires the four communication skills. It makes me a teacher more committed to my work and more responsible for the mission I have in each of the courses I work.

Another aspect in which I reflect is the resource or material that I use, must be carefully designed, organized and chosen so that the student can work and through each activity strengthen their learning. The use of the material is focused to motivate and make the student feels involved and sees that their learning is being achieved, and not quite the opposite. When the student answers activities that he does not understand or that does not take on meaning for him, then, the result is, the student complete the activity only for the grade but not learning. For me, the most important thing is that the students learn.

The structure and order of the explanation during the class is very important, in a virtual way the percentage of intervention is more about the teacher, so it must be very organized so that the student, who is the listener, the receiver, understands the explanation, the subject that is being learned, and more when a foreign language is taught.

With these reflections I have improved in the design of material and class planning, since currently I pay attention to each activity that I schedule. I think how the explanation should be made to be very clear, so that the training in the Virtual modality mediated by technology becomes an ally of the learning process. For me, it is very important that the student feels involved in the class, through several technological resources I have been able to show that the student performs and puts into practice each of the topics that are worked during the classes and that he finally learns.

My professional projection is aimed at constant training and research to improve, learn and innovate in my pedagogical practices. I am interested in being constantly learning in order to improve the training of my students. For me it is important to keep in mind that students in training are people and that they should receive from me all the best.

Being a teacher of virtual English leads me to reflect, that the design of the material, the planning and organization of each class and an excellent explanation are not enough to generate learning, or that I finally think that I have already done everything.

I have always thought and I think in the future that I cannot fall into being a professional who is only interested in doing the job, in repeating classes. That is why I in each class innovate and restructure the classes. I know that I teach the same content, but I like to innovate and investigate how my students learn to design and improve each class.

For my professional projection, I demand to be training and studying to be at the forefront of what is in keeping with the time; always taking into account that those who are in the distance are people who are in future professional training processes, which makes me In an example to follow, and for me it is always important to project my work with the responsibility and commitment that each of my students deserves.

My projection as a virtual teacher is clearly marked in my way of being, of doing, of learning, I am committed to my profession and with those who semester after semester we share a training space, in which I always give my best so that they Become excellent professionals.

Thank you!

(Alice, Prospection)

Appendix D

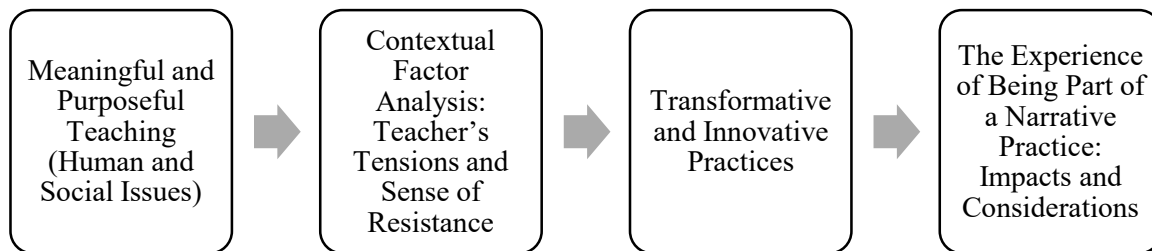**Sample Framework of Narrative Interview**

ENTREVISTA NARRATIVA

"Towards the understanding of the (Re)construction of Language Teacher Identity: A Narrative

Embedded Study"

Estimado(a) colega,

La entrevista tiene como propósito compartir temas significativos que surgieron de la lectura de

las historias que constituyen la práctica narrativa en la que participó. Los temas están

interconectados e ilustran aspectos que son relevantes en su proceso de (re)construcción de

identidad como docente de lengua. Por favor, comparta sus apreciaciones por cada tema,

teniendo en cuenta la contextualización que se le brinde. Algunos temas se ejemplifican con

extractos de sus propias historias.

Themes for Narrative Interview (NI)

Meaningful and Purposeful Teaching (Human and Social Issues)	→	Contextual Factor Analysis: Teacher's Tensions and Sense of Resistance	→	Transformative and Innovative Practices	→	The Experience of Being Part of a Narrative Practice: Impacts and Considerations

Selected Excerpts from Written Life Stories

Meaningful and Purposeful Teaching (Human and Social Issues)

My second event was when I had my first teaching experience. By that time I was

studying, I was in fifth semester, so I had the chance of being an assistant teacher in a

course for the university students. The course took two months, and during that time I

tried to be super creative with the way I made the students to understand the topics; they

really enjoyed coming to class and I started to feel something close to satisfaction. At

that moment, I knew I wanted to teach and I discovered how teaching gave me a

rewarding sensation that I could compare to happiness. [sic] (Alejandra, Retrospection)

Contextual Factor Analysis: Teacher's Tensions and Sense of Resistance

I must say it is quite necessary to work more on assuring minimum standards for learning

a foreign language, this, for example regarding the excessive number of students in some

cases, situation that entails short student monitoring and, as consequence, unknown

learning processes even for the teachers. It is important to highlight that not in every

institution, virtual language courses work the same, however, that has been quite my

recurring experience. I do not see myself being a language teacher for so long, I have

decided I need to make a difference in "the world", in my world and in what it is around

it by doing something that represents a feeling of fulfillment, something that gives me

peace, and allows me build happiness day by day. When I think of working as a virtual

teacher, **the sense of being in a comfort zone comes to my mind**, a way of getting a

good payment by doing something I already know how to do, but honestly, I am not

capable to find sense in continue doing a job that I cannot be comfortable enough with.

[sic] (Alejandra, Prospection)

Transformative and Innovative Practices

Becoming a distance teacher has been a challenge and a completely different experience

from what I had been doing before, (working face-to-face with students, dealing with

situations and creating strategies in order to make my lessons enjoyable and memorable,

and of course finding ways to make my students understand the language).

I tried to bring some of what I used to do in the classroom and adapt it to the context, so I

created different types of presentations, and wanted to make the teleclasses as interesting

as I could. I also used videos and listening material to get students interested and

involved in their learning process. [sic] (Alejandra, Interpretation)

The Experience of Being Part of a Narrative Practice: Impacts and Considerations