

Navigating the Self: Examining English Teacher Researcher Identity Construction Trajectory and its Relation with the Enactment of a Critical Decolonial Stance in ELT Through Collaborative Autoethnography¹.

Navegando el Yo: Examinando la Trayectoria de Construcción de la Identidad del Docente de Inglés Investigador y su Relación con la Representación de una Postura Crítica Decolonial en ELT a Través de la Autoetnografía Colaborativa.

Jhon Eduardo Mosquera Pérez

Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia, Colombia

Flor Ángela Hurtado Torres

Santo Tomas University, Colombia

Daniel Elias Pérez Díaz²

Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia, Colombia

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² jhon58745@hotmail.com, angelaht16@outlook.com, danielielias.perez@uptc.edu.co

Abstract:

This collaborative autoethnographic research explores the identity shaping construction trajectory of a group of three English teacher researchers as well as the repercussions that these processes had on the enactment of a critical decolonial perception toward the ELT field. Using a qualitative approach, the English teachers engaged in this collaborative autoethnography shared their experiences, beliefs, and influences to collectively examine how these influenced their evolving professional identities and their current critical understanding of the field. In general, the study reveals that collaborative autoethnography provides a unique platform for examining the identity trajectory of individuals and for establishing a connection between the past and the present. The findings similarly highlight the interplay between individual experiences, sociocultural contexts, and pedagogical practices, fostering a deeper understanding of English teacher researcher identity development. By emphasizing the significance of collective exploration, this study advocates for incorporating collaborative autoethnography more actively as a valuable tool for professional development in English education and research in general, and in Colombia in particular.

Key words: Autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, decoloniality, English teacher identity, English teacher researcher identity

Resumen:

Esta investigación autoetnográfica colaborativa explora el proceso de formación identitaria de un grupo de tres profesores investigadores de inglés, así como las repercusiones que este proceso tuvo en su percepción crítica decolonial del campo ELT. Usando un enfoque cualitativo, los profesores de inglés que participaron en esta autoetnografía colaborativa compartieron sus experiencias, creencias e influencias, para así examinar colectivamente cómo estas influyeron en sus identidades profesionales y en su comprensión crítica actual del campo ELT. En general, el estudio revela que la autoetnografía colaborativa proporciona una plataforma única para examinar la trayectoria de identidad de los individuos así como para establecer una conexión entre el pasado y el presente. De igual manera los hallazgos resaltan la interacción entre las experiencias individuales, los contextos socioculturales y las prácticas pedagógicas, fomentando una comprensión más profunda del desarrollo de la identidad del profesor de inglés como investigador. Al enfatizar la importancia de la exploración colectiva, este estudio aboga por incorporar más activamente la autoetnografía colaborativa como una herramienta valiosa para el desarrollo profesional en la educación e investigación en inglés en general, y en Colombia en particular.

Palabras clave: Autoetnografía, autoetnografía colaborativa, decolonialidad, identidad de profesores de inglés, identidad de profesores de inglés investigadores

Resumo

Esta pesquisa autoetnográfica colaborativa explora o processo de formação da identidade de um grupo de três professores pesquisadores de inglês, bem como as repercussões que esse processo teve em sua percepção crítica descolonial do campo ELT. Usando uma abordagem qualitativa, os professores de inglês que participaram desta autoetnografia colaborativa compartilharam suas experiências, crenças e influências, a fim de examinar coletivamente como isso influenciou suas identidades profissionais e sua atual compreensão crítica do campo ELT. No geral, o estudo revela que a autoetnografia colaborativa fornece uma plataforma única para examinar a trajetória de identidade dos indivíduos, bem como estabelecer uma conexão entre o passado e o presente. Da mesma forma, os achados destacam a interação entre experiências individuais, contextos socioculturais e práticas pedagógicas, promovendo uma compreensão mais profunda do desenvolvimento da identidade do professor de inglês como pesquisador. Ao enfatizar a importância da exploração coletiva, este estudo defende a incorporação mais ativa da autoetnografia colaborativa como uma ferramenta valiosa para o desenvolvimento profissional na educação e pesquisa em inglês em geral, e na Colômbia em particular.

Palavras chave: Autoetnografia, autoetnografia colaborativa, decolonialidade, identidade de professores de inglês, identidade de professores de inglês de pesquisa

Introduction

Stories (*hereafter narratives*) have always represented a mechanism for transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other. This fact has been supported by scholars (Merriam, 2014, Saldaña, 2011) who affirm that narratives do not only resemble a way of meaning making, but also a tool for understanding human subconsciousness in a better and more profound and rich way. Interestingly, and due to the narrative turn that took place within academia some years ago (Goodson & Gill, 2011), narratives have been gaining a growing sense of recognition in applied linguistics (AL) and in other fields as it is the case of the teaching of English as a foreign and second language (TEFL/TESL). Because of this, it is possible to affirm that now narratives are widely acknowledged sources that do not only constitute data collection and analysis processes in the recent qualitative inquiry dimensions, but are also approaches employed especially in research studies intending to explore identity construction and reconfiguration over time and across varied layers.

Bearing the previously mentioned aspects in mind, this study seeks to make a contribution to the growing body of academic literature regarding English language teacher identity construction and its intersection with collaborative autoethnography in Colombia by exploring the ways that a group of three in-service university English language teacher researchers (*who performed as the authors and participants of this study at the same time*) have shaped their identity as teachers researchers. Specifically, the study analyzes their identity shaping trajectory and how their lived experiences have contributed to construct an identity not only as researchers but also as critical decolonial scholars that push for urgent changes within ELT. The current study was carried out having in mind that this and related research initiatives may constitute a benchmark for future inquiries as despite the relatively growing acceptance of autoethnography and other approaches derived from this dimension (*netnography, collaborative autoethnography, duoethnography, community autoethnography, critical autoethnography*) along academia, more collaborative autoethnographic projects are being needed to fully cement autoethnography as a valid and worth implementing research method in English language teaching research in Colombia.

Equally important, undergoing more collaborative autoethnographic based research studies will contribute to keep expanding identity theory in Colombia, as this professional dimension has been mostly studied from the outside. An evidence of this affirmation are the multiple studies that have been conducted at a national level, like those by Guerrero and Meadows (2015), Hernández-Varona & Gutiérrez-Álvarez (2020); Lander (2018), Macias et al. (2020), Mosquera and Losada (2022), Ovalle-Quiroz and González (2023); Ubaque and Castañeda-Peña (2020); Ubaque-Casallas (2023) which although have undoubtedly improved the way English teachers' identity construction and renegotiation is perceived across diverse

levels and settings, including postgraduate education and even queer and indigenous scenarios, such an action is always done following an etic stance, that is, following an outsider position where the researcher is not intimately involved in the process. Additionally, scholarly literature existing in the field in Colombia does not seem to inform the existing nexus between the past and current experiences that individuals go through and how said lived experiences influence the development of a critical decolonial stance towards the field and knowledge making in general.

To examine the teacher researcher identity construction trajectory of the three English teachers involved in this study, the following research questions guided the overall inquiry: What does collaborative autoethnography reveal about the identity shaping trajectory as researchers of a group of three English teachers? How are their experiences intertwined? And, finally, in what ways do these individual, sociocultural, and pedagogical practices and experiences contribute to the enactment and understanding of a critical and decolonial stance from the field? Now we present the literature review that supported this study.

Theoretical Considerations

Collaborative Autoethnography as a Research Method

Traditional research methods in applied linguistics have long been considered highly rigorous and trustworthy (Wall, 2006). This has been crucial in ensuring the correct development of research processes within the field. However, a notable shift occurred in recent years, challenging the notion that researchers should remain detached observers. Pioneering work by Ellis (1993; 1995) and other theorists led to a transformation in the perception of the researcher's role. Gradually, researchers were encouraged to become active participants in the research, as their personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts were recognized as relevant data for analysis.

Amidst this changing landscape, collaborative autoethnography emerged as a relatively new research approach, seeking to challenge traditional and authoritative perspectives that prioritized the rigor of conventional research methods and scientific objectivity (Wall, 2008). Broadly speaking, collaborative autoethnography involves analyzing the narratives shared by participants to uncover commonalities and divergences, shedding light on their experiences within specific sociocultural contexts (Chang et al., 2016). When undergoing collaborative autoethnography, the participant/researcher plays a pivotal role in the process, serving as the epistemological and ontological nexus (Spry, 2001) upon which the process and overall results are obtained.

Although collaborative autoethnography may initially appear focused on individual experiences ("I"), it transcends the personal realm. Thus, one of the key characteristics

of collaborative autoethnography is its focus on inclusivity and shared authorship, where multiple researchers or participants collaborate in the research process, bringing diverse perspectives and insights to the table. Participants and researchers engaging in collaborative autoethnography must consider the social, cultural, linguistic, and political dimensions surrounding their experiences. By examining the interplay between personal traits and cultural influences, collaborative autoethnography facilitates a holistic analysis of the narratives and events under exploration (Méndez, 2014). Additionally, collaborative autoethnography embraces reflexivity, encouraging researchers to openly acknowledge their own subjectivities, emotions, and biases, thereby enhancing the transparency and credibility of the research findings. This approach is particularly valuable in illuminating complex social issues, fostering empathy, and generating knowledge that is both rigorous and deeply human-centered.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that successfully conducting collaborative autoethnography involves a carefully orchestrated series of steps to ensure a rich and meaningful research journey. The first critical step is assembling a diverse and committed group of researchers or participants who are willing to actively engage in the collaborative process, establishing clear communication channels and establishing trust among all involved parties is essential. Next, a well-defined research focus or topic should be chosen, one that resonates with all collaborators. The data collection phase follows, where each participant shares their personal narratives and experiences related to the chosen topic. This step can include written accounts, audio or video recordings, or any other medium that captures the essence of their narratives. Once the data is collected, the analysis phase begins, where the group collaboratively delves into the shared narratives to identify patterns, themes, and connections. This collective sensemaking process ensures a multiplicity of perspectives, enriching the interpretation. Lastly, the results are displayed and shared with the community willing to get involved in the process. These steps served as the basis for the current study, and for a better understanding of them they will be better explained in the methodology section.

Methodology

The implementation of this research study was grounded in the qualitative paradigm, and it embraced a collaborative autoethnographic methodology to explore a pertinent social phenomenon. The decision to adopt the collaborative autoethnographic approach went beyond our mere and superficial preference; it was driven by its unique ability to depart from the traditional detachment of researchers and instead foster a deep connection between the personal experiences of the authors and the subject under investigation. Indeed, collaborative autoethnography offered a distinct advantage in that it permitted a collective exploration of researcher subjectivity. By intertwining individual narratives, the researchers found themselves intricately woven into the social dimension they sought to understand. This integration with the social

dimension, as highlighted by Ariza-Quiñones et al. (2022), further strengthens the position of collaborative autoethnography as a highly social approach to qualitative research that is not only on the process perse and on the results obtained, but on the people who underlie such a process.

Participant- Researchers' Positionalities

Mosquera-Pérez

I am a Colombian ELT professor and scholar that identifies as a professional under a constant process of construction (Barkhuizen, 2016; Danielewicz, 2014) as my identity trajectory has been redefined based on several experiences I have been through. I have taught English across all educational contexts, and at this moment I am performing as a full time English teacher educator researcher who is teaching pre-service EFL teachers within the context of a foreign language teacher education program in a Colombian public university. As such, I have been actively involved with research processes that range from English as an international lingua franca, World Englishes, critical discourse analysis, teacher's identity, among others.

Hurtado-Torres

I am Ángela, an English teacher whose identity as a person and as a professional has been highly influenced by my roots. I am the daughter of the first generation of a peasant family that had the opportunity to go to the university. I have worked in public and private schools and universities in Colombia and in the United States. Currently, I am performing as a full time English teacher in a Colombian private university. My interest for vindicating the stories of communities that , same as rural areas, have been invisibilized, has made that my research interests lean towards social justice practices, fostering in students the critical thinking, connecting school learning with everydayness, raising awareness about the power and knowledge relation, with the objective of encouraging a social transformation.

Pérez-Diaz

I am a Colombian foreign language teacher whose teaching practice has been influenced by multiple national and international cultures. Being exposed to foreign cities such as Poitiers in France and Thessaloniki in Greece have made me rethink my teaching identity and conclude that my role in teaching is not limited to my country or only one place, but to the world (Guerrero & Quintero, 2021). Similarly, I have had

the opportunity to work in all educational contexts (both children and youth, as well as university students and adults seeking employment opportunities). I currently work as a full-time English teacher and French tutor at a private Colombian university.

My interest in research is centered on the fact that I have been exposed to different ideologies of various European countries which have led me to perceive a worldwide culture. These events have made my critical spirit increase and at the same time instill a solid goodwill for my students to reflect beyond learning metalinguistic aspects of the foreign language. Likewise, transmitting this critical thinking through the material design is something that attracts my attention since it is the way to constitute a living and active resource for future teaching practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned above, when undergoing CAE reflexivity plays a crucial role throughout the process. As the participants and researchers directly involved, we had to openly acknowledge our own subjectivities, emotions, and biases, understanding their influence on the research process and findings. This transparency enhanced the rigor and authenticity of the study. Bearing these elements in mind, and as a way to weave together our own interpretations, reflections, and insights into a cohesive narrative, we decided to follow the framework proposed by Fallas-Escobar and Pentón-Herrera's (2022) in their inquiry, and followed a three step process for data collection and analysis, being these as follow:

Step 1: Setting the Ground

Before formally beginning this research process, we held constant meetings with the purpose of identifying narratives and experiences that could serve as our data. We held these types of face to face meetings for a couple of months, and once we decided upon the experiences we would be analyzing, we agreed on the need to better understand those that had contributed to the construction of our teacher researchers identity by way of a collaborative autoethnography. At this point we established to write about instances that had influenced or not the construction of our identity as researchers. Such a writing process was unstructured and we agreed on the need to write about what we considered was relevant for the aforementioned process. We agreed to constantly share our texts with the others so that we could continuously be engaged with the data being gathered and with the initial experiences being reconstructed.

Step 2: Formalizing the Process and Sharing our Initial Narratives

Once we had the initial drafts of our texts, we proceeded to share them with one another. At this point we observed that we had written about many significant experiences within our time as undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although most of these experiences were significant to us, we decided to narrow down our experiences and principally centered our attention on those having to do with research during our time as students in the two aforementioned scenarios. We are mentioning this because even if we acknowledge that all the experiences we had written about were important, analyzing all of them in a single research article would be practically impossible. Thus, and as suggested in previous lines, we focused on particular research experiences that took place in our time as former bachelor's and master's degree students.

Step 3: Strengthening our Narratives and Establishing Themes

This was the final step of the process. At this stage we read each other's narratives again bearing in mind the research objectives we had initially established. If a first reading of the narratives gave us an initial idea of the experiences that contributed to the initial shaping of our identity as teacher researchers, this second round of analysis allowed us to develop a more profound understanding of these. In this sense, themes having to do with initial experiences with research held in the frame of our corresponding undergraduate programs (as students, with professors, in research seedbeds), and subsequent experiences we had been engaged in (within the context of our respective master degrees, and our own work as ELT researchers) began to emerge. At this point, we compared and contrasted once more these initial codes and established some final categories, namely: 1) *Undergraduate Education and Initial Experiences with Research: The Emergence of a Teacher Researcher Identity?*, 2) *Experiences with Research in Postgraduate Education and Beyond: Towards an Endless Path of Transformation*, and 3) *Performing as Critical Decolonial Scholars: Enacting a Reflexive and Transformational Stance in ELT and Beyond Through Research*. Below we provide richer details for each one of them.

Findings

Undergraduate Education and Initial Experiences with Research: The Emergence of a Teacher Researcher Identity?

Becoming an English teacher requires formally enrolling in a foreign language teacher education program. It happened to the three of us. Through the development of the narratives we observed that we had an element in common: we joined a teacher education program from two different universities in Colombia because of our desire to be educators working within the ELT field. However, while we were considering this possibility back in our years as students, we never thought of doing research or becoming teacher researchers as an important aspect to develop, as appreciated in the following pieces of data:

“Each story has its own beginning. Mine started at the age of 15. The year was 2008. I was at home, resting on the floor of my house. I was considering the path I would be taking for my life, when, suddenly, my mom (who has always been characterized for her wise way of thinking) approached me and said: Jhon, have you ever thought about what you would like to be in the future? Naturally, my answer was not very clear (probably a product of my immature way of seeing life at that time). After a couple of minutes, mom replied to my answer and said: why do not you consider the option of becoming an English teacher. I find it necessary to stress that I was not totally sure about mom’s recommendations, but what she said later on was what definitively engaged me in the process of learning English at university level. Her words were literally these: if you studied English, Jhon, you would have the chance of making a decent living apart from being able to travel all over the world, because English is the global language (Nunan, 2001). When I think about my mom’s speech, I acknowledge that her words have always resonated in my head, as most of the things she “predicted” back in 2008, are part of my memory now” (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 1).

“I always liked the Spanish subject when I was studying at school. And since my sister had already joined university, she got me the syllabus of the Modern Languages program with an emphasis on Spanish-English and talked to me about the subjects that were part of this undergraduate degree. I wasn’t sure I wanted to study English, but my sister told me that by studying languages, my field of action would be wider and I would have more possibilities of getting a better job. Since that conversation I had with her, when I was in tenth grade, I began to study the English language on my own thanks to material that my sister and my teachers at school got me. In tenth and eleventh grade, my attention was focused on the two languages. Hence, my motivation to study the degree I chose was on one hand, the like I had for my mother tongue, and on the other hand, the influence that other people who were aware of the possible advantages this would bring me had on me” (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

The just mentioned aspect is reinforced in the following data retrieved from the narrative by Pérez-Díaz who similarly remarked not feeling attracted by research back in his years as an undergraduate student due to various circumstances. In his words,

he expresses that he remembers when he “started taking a course called “research methodology” I perceived doing research as something boring, too methodical, and impractical. I remember that it was a very structured class where we had to deliver brief reports on each methodology and approach, but everything only stayed on paper, as we did not perform any formal research process. I consider this class should be the basis for the research project that as students we should present at the end of our studies, but after seeing that little was done, at that time I was not interested in investigating or in getting to know more about different topics related to my profession” (Pérez-Díaz - Narrative 1)

Thus, it is possible to affirm that we all enrolled in a teacher education program with the purpose of merely becoming language teachers in order to have more academic and professional opportunities. It is especially observable in Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres’ narratives who affirm that they decided to study a bachelor’s degree with an emphasis on languages because of the influence that people surrounding them exerted on that regard.

In connection with these elements, some authors including Papanastasiou and Papanastasiou (1997) and Kyriacou et al. (1999) affirm that individuals enroll in teacher education programs without having a clear sense of direction, as in two research studies they carried out participants reported having made the decision of becoming teachers because of the influence their families and friends exerted on them, as seen in our own cases. Nevertheless, in another research study Macías et al. (2020) determined that even though at the very beginning pre-service teachers do not have the intention of staying in the profession, after exposure to all types of experiences, these students begin to develop an initial teacher identity that further motivates them to remain within the field. Taking into consideration these affirmations, here we find it necessary to highlight that something similar happened to us, but with research. At the beginning of our studies we did not plan engaging with research or becoming teacher researchers due to some negative and demotivating experiences we had. This is better expressed by two of us:

“The experiences I had in terms of research during my undergraduate studies were few, if not null. All of us were required to take at least 2 research courses called “Research Methodology” and “Research Seminar”. Despite having to take these 2 mandatory courses (since they belonged to the syllabus of the degree) I feel that what I learned was minimal. Both times I had classes with the same professor, but even after taking these classes (for the 4th and 5th academic semester), it was not even clear to me what the concepts of qualitative or quantitative research implied” (Mosquera- Pérez, Narrative 1).

“Now that I think of it I can only say that the experiences I had were few. I did not have many peers involved in research in my career and the few who did it, did not have good experiences. Teachers who were in charge of the research courses generally dedicated themselves to mentioning the parts of a project, and the types of research. I had several seminars. One of them was titled “pedagogical and investigative projects”. For this course, I had to go to public institutions to make observations to subsequently design improvement strategies. In the sixth semester, I had

to take the research methodology course. I remember that in this subject we had to learn some investigative concepts almost by heart, something which made me feel disinterested towards the class. In the eighth semester I had to take another course known as "research project". In this seminar we had to present a proposal for the development of the thesis, but I feel that most of us proposed some ideas only for approving the subject. I did not have any other course on research, and because of all of these experiences, I was never motivated to carry out a project by myself" (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

As illustrated above, in his time as an undergraduate student Mosquera-Pérez had to take some courses regarding research. However, it seems that such courses did not have an impact on his understanding of the field. The same occurred with Hurtado-Torres. She similarly affirms that despite having to take some research related subjects, she did not find any motivation to continue doing research or to assume research as a possible path to follow in her future professional trajectory. Consequently, we did not see ourselves as researchers nor fully understood the importance of doing research in a field as it is the case of ELT. Because of these frustrations, we would even avoid future experiences with research at all cost:

"In the tenth semester I did a classroom project with a classmate, and I needed to do the thesis as a requirement for graduation. Unfortunately, we did not have an advisor to guide us and we did not feel like we were making any progress. As we were in a hurry to graduate, we gave up on the project, and I decided to enroll in a master's degree as a modality to graduate and not to have to do a research project. That's how I graduated from college" (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

"I did not have any type of experience with research (thesis/monographs), research seedbeds, or the like because the experience I had had with the research courses had not been the best. In fact, having taken these courses made me feel discouraged about what research involves to the point of feeling extremely boring and difficult. I remember that because of the situation, many of my classmates and I took a degree seminar entitled "Multiple Intelligences" to avoid carrying out our respective thesis. A couple of friends intended to develop a thesis project, but they constantly told me that it was an arduous process, and that it required a lot of time, reading, and preparation. They finally gave up with the project" (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 1).

From the three of us, only Pérez-Díaz seems to have had positive experiences when it comes to research in his time as an undergraduate student, as he specifically narrates in the following reflection *"I remember that when I was at the university, a classmate told me about a research seedbed related to the dissemination of the French language through radio. This seedbed is called JOIE, which means joy. Upon receiving the invitation from my classmate, I found myself a little insecure about this experience since I did not know what my tasks would consist of in that hotbed. I was afraid of starting a new process with people who knew about doing research in the subject. It got me worried, honestly. However, it was a very good experience"* (Pérez-Díaz, Narrative 1).

Concerning the aforementioned elements, it appears that even though pre-service EFL teachers must take research oriented courses in the frame of their language teacher

education programs, this action does not necessarily guarantee the shaping of an initial teacher researcher identity, as seen in the previously exemplified data. Hence, we think that it is necessary to expose pre-service teachers to other types of experiences with the intention of raising among them a higher degree of interest towards said dimension. This has been suggested by authors including Mesa-Villa et al. (2020) and Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) for whom engaging in research seedbeds as well as promoting continuous reflection among teachers constitute some of the main factors which may contribute to the resignification of their identity as researchers.

It is worth remarking that although at the beginning of our professional trajectory we did not plan to do research or saw ourselves as researchers because of our lack of experience and guidance, this notion of teachers as researchers would progressively change through time and due to postgraduate education, as in this space we underwent motivational and challenging intellectual opportunities that nurtured our practices.

Experiences with Research in and After Postgraduate Education: Towards an Endless Path of Transformation.

Despite having been engaged in certain courses with research and with other research related activities (as it was the case of Pérez-Díaz who participated in a research seedbed) it is not possible to hold that the formation we received in undergraduate education was enough to contribute to the consolidation of our identity as teacher researchers. On the contrary, by the time of finishing our studies, and as stressed in the above paragraphs, we did not perceive research as an opportunity to continue growing as professionals. Consequently, we did not consider ourselves as teacher researchers or as teachers who could engage at some point with research projects and activities. This situation would change, however, by the moment we undertook postgraduate studies.

Following the view of Álvarez-Valencia (2009) and Viafara and Largo (2018) postgraduate education constitutes the perfect scenario for teachers to develop other dimensions of their professional lives. In their research work, for example, Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) established that after having finished their master's degree in English language teaching, EFL teachers became empowered critical reflective educators. As such, they did not only conceive the teaching profession from a different perspective (a more conscious one). Further than that, they incorporated research related activities in their corresponding educational scenarios more frequently. Thus, it is possible to assert that undergoing postgraduate education contributes to the consolidation of a teacher researcher identity. The same happened to us.

The opportunity of engaging in postgraduate studies (a master's degree, to be more explicit) did not only allow us to develop a higher understanding of our field. Beyond this, this experience permitted us to begin the construction of our identity as teacher researcher as within the frame of this experience we had contact with more

experienced teachers from whom we learned a lot. This specific aspect is observable in Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres's narratives:

“As I have suggested so far, I consider that the construction of my identity as a researcher was not something that happened precisely at the undergraduate level. Furthermore, I consider that the experiences I had during my undergraduate studies did not even contribute to the development of my initial identity as a researcher. On the contrary, the experiences I had there made me feel alienated from the field of research because I didn't see any use in it. It is precisely in the context of my master's degree that my identity as a researcher begins to take shape. I remember that one of the events that most marked the beginning of my career as a researcher was the contact with a professor who was in charge of the course Research II as this person was constantly telling us about the benefits that doing research would have for our future careers. However, he did not only center on this fact. Also, he made us aware about the impact that the previously pointed activity would have not only on our lives as professionals but also as academics who in a certain way would contribute to the construction and consolidation of the ELT field at a national level” (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 2).

“All my research seminar teachers were quite inspiring, with a long trajectory at research. In the first semester I took the seminar: Research Foundations. This course marked a before and after for me in terms of research. As I have remarked, in undergraduate I felt that research was always aimed at improving a skill. However, when I presented my research proposal to my professor in the master's degree I did, he told me that I could impact a community through my research work. Since that moment, I began to consider the possibility of implementing my study in a rural community as I wanted to generate an impact. I remember that such a moment was very special because it changed my perspective of research. I felt that research could fulfill one of my passions, which is working for people from rural communities” (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 2).

As just seen, Mosquera-Pérez maintains that sharing with one specific professor who taught within the context of the master's degree he was undertaking was one of the aspects that contributed to the initial development of his identity as a teacher researcher. In a few words, the aforementioned professor exerted an influence on him. Similarly, Hurtado-Torres highlights that being in contact with professors with a long research trajectory contributed to her formation process. Besides this, she suggests that because of the cordial recommendation of one of her mentors, she even began to combine her own interests with research, and, as a result, one of her research lines was defined.

In connection with these elements, Wenger (1999) remarks that certain dimensions inherent to teacher identity construction take place in the doing. Thus, and as displayed in the previous data, constantly sharing with professional teacher researchers plays an essential role in the formation of one's own identity as researcher. However, we deem it necessary to clarify this is not the only factor that has a repercussion on the aforementioned process. Other experiences such as attending academic conferences derived from the process itself of studying a masters's degree were also important, as exemplified in the following lines retrieved from Hurtado-Torres' narrative:

“I had the opportunity to give presentations while I was doing my master’s degree. It was 2018, and I was a third semester student when I submitted my presentation to an event called “Teachers’ Moot”. This event was organized by the master’s program I was studying at that moment, and it was the first time I presented in those types of scenarios. However, that was only the first experience of three I had in total by that time. I also presented in ASOCOPI in Cartagena, and another one organized by Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. In general, those experiences were very enriching and significant for me as these constituted a dream that came true” (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 2).

At this point, Hurtado-Torres acknowledges the significant contributions that having participated in some academic events had for her initial teacher researcher identity process. Beyond this, she recognizes that by participating in these events, our own research works may profit based on continuous feedback coming from other scholars partaking in such spaces:

“Next year, by 2019, a professor from my university helped me along with another colleague to send our presentation to the “ICQI” (International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry)” run by the University of Illinois, in the United States. Once again, I saw how dreams that seemed impossible were materializing. I had the opportunity to travel and participate in the congress, and to this day I feel that I do not have words to describe how incredible it was. In the first place, it was very interesting to learn about the topics that were being investigated. On the other hand, it was also very interesting to observe firsthand the way those themes were presented, since many of the speakers gave an account of their studies through various artistic expressions. I was scared about my presentation, but in the table where I presented people were nice and made significant contributions to the study I was developing”

Hurtado-Torres was not the only participant that recognized the importance of academic events for the initial formation of her identity as a teacher researcher. Mosquera-Pérez further acknowledges this aspect, as seen in the following lines:

“I would like to stress that thanks to having submitted my first presentation at an academic event, and after having been so well received, I decided to continue participating actively as a speaker in specialized ELT events. Up to this point, I have participated as a speaker in approximately 15 national and international academic events as I understood that attending these types of scenarios is of paramount importance when it comes to knowledge dissemination” (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 2).

Interestingly, although we were able to establish that the whole experiences we had in our time in postgraduate education were fundamental for the progressive development of our identity as teacher researchers, we also recognize the fact that experiences we have had after that time have been decisive for the consolidation of such a dimension. In this regard, Hurtado-Torres and Pérez-Díaz state the following:

“In 2021 I began to work in the university which is my current institutional affiliation, and there I met Professors Mosquera-Pérez and Pérez-Díaz. We formed a group with the purpose of doing research and up to date we have developed three studies. This experience has been highly beneficial in the sense that I have had the opportunity of improving my knowledge of the design

of instruments and other similar aspects when it comes to doing research. Additionally, and because of this, we have had the opportunity of participating in congresses outside the country, spaces in which we have not only received very relevant feedback, but we have also made connections to collaborate with our projects. Hence, it has been a very valuable opportunity". (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 3).

"Now that I work for a university, I have had the opportunity to have new investigative experiences and I have been also able to work with two colleagues who are professors Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres. This process has helped me to know and learn from the investigative practices of my colleagues, which I see as something very positive for my professional training" (Pérez-Díaz, Narrative 3).

In her narrative 3, Hurtado-Torres recognizes that after the experiences she was exposed to in postgraduate education, she has had the opportunity of engaging in research with two other colleagues (prof. Mosquera-Pérez and Pérez-Díaz) in order to continue doing investigations revolving around her research interests. Similarly, in his narrative 3, Pérez-Díaz stresses that by being engaged in such a work, his knowledge about different dimensions of knowledge having to do with research seems to have improved. Hence, assuming a more active role when it comes to research and professional networking is one of the characteristics that teacher researchers enact.

We deem it necessary to mention that even if it appears to be that after our initial experiences with research in postgraduate education we were more willing to expand our network and be actively engaged with other professionals from the field, we were also able establish that for us research transcended instrumental and objectifying stances and became a lifelong endeavor through which could construct knowledge while helping others. In turn, we began to conceive research as a mechanism to collaborate with people and communities surrounding us, as displayed by Hurtado-Torres who comments that *"It is necessary to mention that the work we have done has strengthened many of my skills. It has allowed me to recognize that my identity as a researcher also allows me to have a voice and thus generate important transformations in the field of ELT and within my own classroom context"*.

Performing as Critical Decolonial Scholars: Enacting a Reflexive and Transformational Stance in ELT and Beyond Through Research

Maybe one of the most powerful takeaways derived from this collaborative autoethnography is that beyond assuming research and our identity as teacher researchers as an opportunity to grow professionally, it constitutes a chance to critically examine the field while promoting courses of action and change. This is clearly reflected in the narrative provided by Hurtado-Torres who contends that *"as my research journey progressed, I encountered professors who empathized with my evolving*

perspective. Nevertheless, this path towards a more profound and human-centered research methodology was fraught with challenges. Pursuing topics not considered contemporarily relevant exposed me to marginalization within academic circles. I felt both excluded and reluctant to conform to an environment characterized by individualism and competitiveness, contrary to the research identity I was cultivating”

In her excerpt, Hurtado-Torres acknowledges that by being engaged in research and with different professionals and communities, she understands that the ultimate goal of engaging in research should not be that of profiting in an economic or professional way. Further than that, she now thinks that research should be a tool to help human beings and communities improve not only at an intellectual but also at a humanistic level. The same stance can be encountered in the case of Pérez-Díaz who stresses that

“Pedagogical experiences are a fundamental space to reflect on the traditional educational paradigms that have been imposed since colonization since they serve as a guide to question and challenge the power structures and hegemonic knowledge that have been imposed throughout history. Both in my role as an undergraduate and graduate student, as well as in my current role as an English and French teacher, I have witnessed a colonial education characterized by the imposition of a single form of knowledge, privileging the Western perspective and denying the richness and diversity of other knowledge and cultures. Thus, in my perspective, I perceive that Colombian teachers have been victims and accomplices at the same time of a mentality dependent on this “global north”. This is the specific case of the design of materials where I have perceived throughout my experience that the priority is to hire foreign publishing agencies and not to encourage the creation of autonomous didactic materials. This has generated an educational system that perpetuates inequalities and exclusion, since the experiences and knowledge of teachers are neither recognized nor valued, and in the case of indigenous communities, Afro-descendants and other cultural minorities, they play a negligible role in the classroom”

In the two cases shown above, Hurtado-Torres and Pérez-Díaz maintain that their perspectives towards research and knowledge in general have changed due to their continuous contact with other researchers as well as and dynamics taking place within the field. This is similarly illustrated by Mosquera-Pérez for whom the notion of what bilingualism is, has evolved.

“Getting directly into my understanding of what bilingualism implies, I feel totally necessary to maintain that now I am more fully aware of all what it requires, implies and signifies for a nation like Colombia. It is really curious to perceive that while at postgraduate education and from our role as academics in formation we are already assuming more autonomous, critical, and emancipatory perspectives, in undergraduate education we were not aware of all what it requires and implies to be an English language teacher, or, as Guerrero (2008) suggests, we were not even given the opportunity to. Thus, one of our challenges and future endeavors as English language teachers, I believe, will be giving our students the chance of not only become aware of the fact that bilingualism goes much beyond the mere English/Spanish relationship, but also make them acquainted with the latest issues and trends within the field such as English as an international lingua franca, global Englishes languages teaching, postmethod pedagogies as well

as critical/emancipatory methods so that they will also have the opportunity of contributing the the development of a more autonomous less hegemonized Colombian society where mainly the powerful can decide” (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 3)

“Intriguingly, the just mentioned situations align with what Kachru (2012) has referred to as “three circles models” for the teaching of English. According to this professor, in expanding circle countries (like Colombia among others) the teaching of English merely responds to international agendas (Correa & Usma, 2013; Valencia, 2013) which sell the idea of progress through English (Escobar, 2013). In this sense, individuals who can afford to pay for better language education will have better job and education opportunities over those who can not pay for those services, leading the English language towards a condition that professor Mahboob (2011) regards as a “gatekeeper” (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 3)

Equally important, Mosquera-Pérez manifests that his perception of what English education and bilingualism implies goes much beyond, and now he recognizes that while it is undeniable that English is a language that offers privileges and benefits, it also oppresses people and communities at large, especially the most vulnerable.

“The gatekeeping condition that the English language has been exerting in Colombia is something really preoccupying. On the one hand, there are individuals who have much money to pay for international exchange programs, intensive preparation courses as well as for the materials required for it. On the other hand, there are individuals who must decide whether to work for eating or studying. Therefore, how can we as English language teachers contribute to the improvement of all of these situations? And more importantly, how are we ensuring that from our role we are not being some of the perpetrators of all of these conditions? Well, to be honest, I have no answer yet. What I am pretty sure of is that at least by being aware of all of these facts and of all of what bilingualism and bilingual education really implies, we will be able to give one step at a time and will surely contribute to the transition from teacher-centered and traditional cognitive/linguistic oriented ones to more sociocritical student-centered models of teaching; which is something our Colombian society really needs”

To finish, we would like to sustain that although engaging in research and in other professional and community related practices has allowed a more profound and critical decolonial understanding of the field, and even if we now advocate more frequently for social justice and other human-centered approaches and practices in English language teaching, embracing the role of critical-decolonialized teacher/researchers has been a complex and challenging evolution. Therefore, it becomes essential to keep promoting English teaching otherwise stances that do not sell the idea of English as the “key” to the world, but approaches and practices that promote multiculturalism, multilingualism, language ecologies, English as a lingua franca and world Englishes oriented pedagogies, to mention a few, as a manner to continue decolonizing ELT. This is our biggest commitment at the moment of writing our narratives, and letting you know what we have learned along this ongoing way.

Conclusions

The first conclusion we drew from this collaborative autoethnographic study is that the experiences held in the context of undergraduate education were not enough to develop an initial teacher researcher identity. Even if we were exposed to some experiences regarding research, these did not give us the tools nor the chance for understanding why becoming ELT researchers was important. Thus, more constantly exposing and engaging pre-service EFL teachers to research since undergraduate education is important if they are expected to contribute to the advancement of the field. Promoting research oriented practices from an early stage in teacher education can contribute to the detachment of knowledge production systems which merely situates Anglo and Euro-centered perspectives, as historically speaking research has been perceived as an activity that only experts, especially those coming from more powerful settings, can perform.

Another conclusion we obtained after the sharing of our narratives and after the implementation of the overall study is that even if experiences held in the frame of postgraduate education were fundamental for the initial construction of our identity as teacher researchers, continuous engagement in research and in other community and professional development activities are essential for the proper consolidation of an identity as a researcher. These scenarios should be more constantly promoted with the intention of raising awareness among educators about the importance that research has for their professional lives and for the overall ELT field. Besides, it is important to promote research not only as an activity to achieve professional advancements, that is, getting higher employment positions in life. Research and engagement in knowledge production should be promoted so that pre-service teachers and in-service teachers alike understand the importance and impact that this activity may have for a country like Colombia. Development and more socially aware practices, among others, could be the result of such an action.

Lastly, we would like to finish this article by inviting other researchers and educators to continue examining teacher researcher identity and other dimensions of the field as it is the case of professional development and teachers' agency through collaborative autoethnography. Although this is a relatively new approach for doing research in Colombia, promoting more studies revolving around collaborative autoethnography could help enrich scholarly literature in national ELT by examining how multiple dimension having to do with the self that educators enact are being constructed across diverse scenarios (be these undergraduate or postgraduate education) in the national context. This was our case. Although we initially did not see nor conceive research as a potential mechanism for growing professionally while helping others around us, now we believe that research has the power to keep influencing society in a positive way. This collaborative autoethnography, though, is not the final result of our self-reflection process. It is an ongoing analysis derived from a wider project that seeks to analyze

and better understand how language ideologies, pedagogical practices, and Global North and Global South epistemologies intertwine when it comes to the continuous identity construction and negotiation process that in-service EFL teachers go through. These results will be shared on another occasion, once the process has been finalized (considering that one's identity is continuously being influenced by multiple factors we encounter in life and academia). Then, time will tell.

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Authors:

Jhon Eduardo Mosquera Pérez is a full time English teacher educator and researcher at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC) in Boyacá. He holds an. B.A and an M.A in English Language Teaching from Universidad Surcolombiana and an M.A in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Currently he belongs to the groups “Aprenap” and “Comuniquémonos” (Universidad Surcolombiana), “Corporación si mañana despierto” (Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia – UPTC) and “LSLP” – Literacies in Second Languages Learning” (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana) where he addresses research in relation to the areas of English as a lingua franca, World Englishes, language ideologies among others.

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4027-3102>

Flor Angela Hurtado holds a B.A in Modern Languages and a master's degree in Language Teaching from Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (Uptc). Currently, she is a full-time teacher at the Language Institute, Centro Internacional de Lenguas y Culturas Extranjeras -CILCE, from Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja. Angela is a peasants' daughter, whose research interests have been related to her roots and to social justice practices. She is part of the research group KIA (Knowledge in Action) at Uptc and the research group Language and Culture Research Cluster from Santo Tomás University.

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9071-5522>

Daniel Elias Pérez Diaz holds a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages English and French from the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). Master of French didactics as a Foreign and Second Language from the University of Poitiers/France. Scholarship holder of the DIN (research direction) in 2015. He has interest in the creation and design of materials, as well as materials, as well as decolonial theories, the didactics of EFL/ESP/FLE/FOS/FLI.. Currently he is a full time professor of French at the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia.

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1470-4784>

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