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Narratives about Being and Becoming English Language Teachers in an ELT Education Program¹

Narrativas sobre el ser y llegar a ser profesores de inglés en un programa de licenciatura en inglés

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the narratives written by four pre-service English language teachers (PELTs) during the last semester of their undergraduate program. The study aims to understand the constructions related to being and becoming PELTs and the possible contributions that the English language teacher (ELT) education program provided to shape those identities. The narratives were reconstructed from two narrative frames written by the PELTs and their responses to a narrative interview. The results reveal how participants (re)signify their profession from their experiences in the program, the teaching practicum, and other settings. PELTs construct and consolidate their professional identity initially from a technical perspective. However, their experiences and the guidance of some teacher educators transformed their view of education into a more critical and informed perspective. In conclusion, professional identity could potentially be formed and changed based on the experiences provided throughout the PELTs' education. Considering this, initial English teacher education programs should establish strategies that contribute to this end from the beginning of undergraduate studies.

Keywords: initial teacher education, narrative inquiry, teacher identity, pre-service English teachers

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un análisis de las narrativas escritas por cuatro profesores de inglés en formación (PELTs) durante el último semestre de su programa de pregrado. El estudio tiene como objetivo comprender las construcciones relacionadas con el ser y el llegar a ser de los PELTs y las posibles contribuciones que el programa de formación en la enseñanza del inglés (ELT) brindó para dar forma a esas identidades. Las narrativas fueron reconstruidas a partir de dos marcos narrativos escritos por los PELTs y sus respuestas a una entrevista narrativa. Los resultados revelan cómo los participantes (re)significan la profesión docente en función de sus experiencias en el programa, la práctica

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docente y otros entornos. Los PELTs construyen y consolidan su identidad profesional inicialmente desde una perspectiva técnica. Sin embargo, sus experiencias y el acompañamiento de algunos profesores transformaron su visión sobre la educación en una perspectiva más crítica e informada. En conclusión, la identidad profesional se forma y cambia a partir de las experiencias brindadas a lo largo de la formación de los PELTs. Con esto en mente, los programas de formación inicial de docentes de inglés deberían establecer estrategias que contribuyan a este fin desde el inicio de los estudios de pregrado.

Palabras clave: formación docente inicial, indagación narrativa, identidad docente, profesores de inglés en formación

Introduction

This paper focuses on the narratives obtained from four pre-service English language teachers' (PELTs) enrolled in an initial English language teaching (ELT) education program, as part of a study that explores the construction of their identity at a public university in southern Colombia. The program has established, as part of its goals, to guarantee that the PELTs are able to teach at different levels of the Colombian education system by the end of their studies. Additionally, it must include pedagogical, research, cultural, social, and humanistic components in its curriculum, which are connected to a culture of peace, as well as an integral development perspective (Universidad Surcolombiana, 2019). This complex task could be overwhelming for PELTs and a challenge for teacher education programs.

The main goal of this research was to understand how PELTs deal with these requirements while pursuing their degrees. Some of the components involved in the program have been locally explored in previous studies. One of these studies aimed to determine the reason for the English courses repetition in the program from the perspective of students and program faculty (Rojas-Barreto & Artunduaga-Cuéllar, 2018), whereas another one aimed to examine teachers' assessment practices (Herrera & Zambrano, 2019). Fernández (2020)

focused on explaining the impact of teaching practicum experiences on PELTs' professional development. Finally, Macías *et al.* (2020) intended to explore the narratives of six PELTs focusing on the process of identity construction. These studies served as the basis for the feasibility of studying PELTs' accounts of being and becoming teachers during their time as undergraduates. Since the aspect of identity has not been extensively explored, and because it contributes and builds knowledge on the field, we sought to describe the (re)signification that PELTs give to being and becoming teachers within their context while determining the contributions of the undergraduate program to PELTs' professional development. The following section shows the main constructs selected to theoretically guide the research: initial teacher education, teacher identity, and narrative inquiry.

Theoretical considerations

Initial teacher education

For this research, it is crucial to define initial teacher education (ITE) since it is the starting point for those who decide to become teachers. Beyond representing the context responsible for preparing PELTs through specific programs, ITE constitutes the ideological, social, and cultural framework that significantly contributes to the construction of PELTs' teaching identity. Schwille and Dembélé (2007) define ITE as the professional preparation before future teachers assume teaching responsibilities. In this sense, the Colombian Ministry of Education states that ITE promotes spaces for PELTs to acquire the fundamentals and basic knowledge to develop the professional competencies necessary to perform their work as teaching professionals (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013). Likewise, ITE aims at providing elements for PELTs to understand and interpret their realities in order to act according to the educational needs that arise.

ITE should not be a prescriptive process of disciplinary techniques and knowledge in the form of general theories and methods, as has been historically imparted (Johnson and Freeman, 2001). However, a study conducted by the Regional Bureau

of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC), where seven experiences of innovative teacher training models were studied, found some educational experiences in which traditional teaching and learning models are evident in teacher training centers (Murillo, 2006). Probably, these findings are probably remnants of perspectives in which teacher training was seen as a cognitive process, isolated from the social and physical contexts where many elements of disciplinary knowledge were included.

On the other hand, some teacher education programs have recognized that ITE goes beyond disciplinary knowledge. These programs add elements such as being, doing, and living in their curriculum and objectives to provide a more holistic education to PELTs, thus generating changes in their prior knowledge and beliefs (Borg, 2015). The knowledge and beliefs that PELTs have about education are brought into the classroom because of the effect of the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), which involves the schooling experiences that they had and teaching behaviors “remain intuitive and imitative” (Borg, 2004, p.274). These are elements that should not be overlooked because, if they are not explored and contested, they could lead PELTs to replicate the same kind of behaviors they experienced.

To this end, ITE programs offer some critical spaces for teachers to reflect on their practices. This perspective also recognizes that PELTs’ experiences provide them with opportunities to reflect and reshape their knowledge, values, and beliefs. ITE then becomes an authentic setting to help PELTs understand their role and perspective on the social problems they may encounter in their future educational settings. These teacher education experiences are situated from a social perspective that makes a difference in the quality of ITE programs, as prior knowledge and experiences can shape what PELTs can learn (Johnson and Freeman, 2001). Therefore, the relevance given to personal histories and cognition must be why some ITE programs impact PELTs more than those that focus on disciplinary knowledge. Similarly, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) acknowledge the role of teacher education programs in providing opportunities to explore and expose the formative contexts that have

influenced on the shaping of identity, understanding ITE as one of those contexts in the case of PELTs.

Teacher identity

Identity can be known as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands the possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 45). These relationships are constituted by and through language as language manifests itself in and through discourse. Discourses contribute to the organization and (re)organization of the meaning of lived experiences in a given group of people or contexts, which, in turn, relate to social, cultural, and political perspectives (Norton, 2013; Varghese *et al.*, 2005). The conflicts related to the constant reorganization and negotiation of identities make them fluid and dynamic, and they may conflict with the views of others (Archanjo *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the plurality of identity is justified since it refers to the different perspectives that an individual’s identity may have (Clarke, 2008).

In the case of teachers, the construction of their identities can be seen from the perspective of personal identity and professional teaching identity. For Bukor (2015), this teaching identity is defined as follows:

“Teacher Identity is an intricate and tangled web of influences and imprints rooted in personal and professional life experience ... [it] reflects not only the professional, educational and educational aspects of being a teacher but – more importantly – the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one’s cumulative life experiences as a human being” (p. 323).

This definition shows lived experiences as the catalyst of teacher identities, which have a direct impact on PELTs’ motivation, decision-making, and meaning-making (Day *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, the construction of identities involves a cognitive process (within the teacher), and so, during this process, PELTs make use of their experiences and shape them based on their perspectives on the teaching profession, educational contexts,

institutional administrators, students, teaching and learning, reasons for choosing the teaching profession, teacher inspiration, and practices (Barkhuizen, 2016a; Trent, 2011). Although many of the aforementioned aspects influence the motivation (psychological construct) of PELTs to become teachers, investment (sociological construct) is another important and necessary aspect in the development of their identities as English teachers and speakers (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Investment considers the individual as a “social being with a complex identity that changes in time and space and is reproduced in social interaction” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37), so it can be stated that investment is also complex, contradictory, and in a state of permanent flux. Within this complexity, investment allows PELTs to manage themselves to achieve their academic and professional goals, also represented in social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Thus, investment becomes a fundamental element in the process of becoming a teacher.

Narratives

In this research, we assume human beings to be narrating beings from an ontological and epistemological point of view (Moen, 2006). We think in the form of stories, speak in the form of stories, and give meaning to our lives the form of stories (Atkinsons, 2007). In this sense, narratives, constructed from events and reconstructed into stories, give meaning to what we know. These narratives allow us to connect accounts with the construction of knowledge. We can state, then, that narratives are created out of nothing but are structured to the extent that there is a situation, a conflict or struggles, a protagonist involved, and a sequence of actions that have a causal relationship (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, narratives are not static, as life stories are not, but are constantly restructured due to the different contexts in which we move and the interactions in which we intervene (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008).

Moreover, narratives transcend the narrated event and become the means to understand the narrator's self and beliefs (Barkhuizen, 2016b). This is achieved when the narrator connects lived experiences to their past, present, and future,

as well as to their emotions and feelings. In this way, narratives become a means of shaping our identities (de Fina, 2015). The analysis of narratives is the primary object of narrative inquiry, which allows people to portray their experiences of the world, interpret them, and make “them personally meaningful” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). In doing so, people can analyze and understand how they can or have constructed certain identities. Thus, experiences and narratives are sources of information and understanding of specific elements related to teachers' identities. By creating and reconstructing the stories we are made of, we can understand ourselves and, by studying them, we help others see what they can do or who they are (Barkhuizen, 2016b).

Methodology

This research was conducted according to the qualitative research paradigm, and it seeks to understand how PELTs interpret their experiences, how they build the world they live in, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Following this purpose, data were collected and analyzed from a narrative research design. Narrative research allows examining aspects of the participants' reality from the collection of their life stories, as well as placing them in the world (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2016b). Conle (2000) states that narratives serve as a means of data collection or as a type of research and sees narratives as an opportunity for the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers. Narratives do not remain stories located in a particular context; they can also influence the understanding of other phenomena in different contexts, especially if what is sought with their creation is developing a critical consciousness that leads to awareness and social and personal transformation, as well as to the empowerment of the author of the narrative and the researchers (Weiler, 1988).

In the case of this research, the primary purpose is to identify how the programs have contributed to pre-service teachers' professional development. Furthermore, this study intends to explore how these PELTs have been building their identity (which

is understood as being and becoming) as future teachers through their narratives. Then, two types of data collection strategies were proposed: narrative frames and narrative interviews.

Narrative frames

Every narrative is a story, and each story consists of three dimensions that interconnect to provide context: time, interactions, and space (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). In this sense, narrative frames support the construction of written narratives in both structure and content. From the researchers' perspective, narrative frames can ensure that the content of the narratives is directed towards what is expected and raised in the research objectives. For this research, two narrative frames were created. They were used at different times in during the research process. The first frame focused on why the participants decided to pursue an undergraduate degree, especially the ELT education program, and the constructs they had regarding the teaching profession. The second frame intended to reconstruct the stories related to their trajectories through the program and their transformations regarding being and becoming English teachers, as well as their expectations and plans after finishing the degree.

Narrative interviews

A second data collection strategy was a narrative interview, which is an unstructured instrument that stimulates the interviewee to tell important facts about their life and social context. It is based on the idea of reconstructing facts from the participants' point of view, so the interviewer's influence should be minimal. To achieve this, the interviewer must use language that attracts the interviewees and make them describe the facts spontaneously (Junqueira *et al.*, 2014). Then, the interviewees must use their memory to tell their stories; knowing that people's memory is selective, it is assumed that the events recorded in the narrative interview correspond to their interpretation of the events. Narrative interviews have a retrospective dimension because they entail looking backward through a series of "episodes that are part of some larger whole" from a certain moment in the present (Freeman, 2015, p.27). The narrative interview was carried out during the

second phase of this study. It was oriented towards collecting and deepening on those other aspects that were left out in the narrative frames.

Participants

Four PELTs aged 21-24 participated in this research (Table 1). The decision to choose only four participants was made because this study included other academic programs in addition to the bachelor's degree in English, but, for the purposes of this article, we focused only on those who belonged to the ITE program. They were willing to provide information and consented to its use by signing an informed consent. They were in their 4th year and were part of a reflective teaching course within the framework of their first teaching practicum at primary and secondary public institutions in Neiva, Huila, Colombia. The participants were randomly selected. Two of them were part of the accreditation process team, so they were well informed about the reforms proposed for the curriculum of the ELT education program. Due to ethical considerations, pseudonyms were used to protect their identity.

Table 1. Participants' information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender
Sarah	21	Female
Karina	23	Female
Sebastian	21	Male
Camilo	24	Male

Source: Authors

Data analysis

The researchers analyzed the narrative frameworks and wrote a single narrative per participant that included both instruments and was complemented by the information obtained in the interview. Each participant revised and approved the final version of their narrative, which complies with the narrative research ethics (*i.e.*, to communicate only what the participants agree to and review the interpretations done by researchers with the participants) (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2018; Smythe

& Murray, 2000). We decided to perform narrative analysis, which, as stated by Polkinghorne (1995), is a way of making sense of the experiences by analyzing participants' narratives. Then, we followed the principles of thematic analysis. This kind of analysis demands "repeated reading of the data, codification, and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 75).

Findings

From the analysis of the information, we could identify three thematic headings: *Initial reasons for enrolling in the ELT education program*, *(Re) signification of what being and becoming an English teacher implies*, and *Contributions of the ELT education program to the conceptualization of being an English teacher*.

Initial reasons for enrolling in the ELT education program

The first theme that emerged provides some answers to why the PELTs chose this initial teaching program. Additionally, PELTs also expressed their imaginaries⁵ and expectations related to their education and prospects. The beginning of the four narratives is linked to the moment when they decided to enroll in the program, and they point out the reason for such decisions. Sarah, for example, said that though she did not intend to be a teacher; she found her interest in the English language as a trigger for her career choice:

My interest in a career started in the eleventh grade; I never wanted to be a teacher, but I really liked English, so I decided to study that. When I received the notification that I had entered the university, I was happy because it is what any student expects, and I was nervous. After all, I knew that I was about to face a challenge. When I started my first semester at the university, I had

grand expectations, for example, that all subjects would be in English, but I also experienced difficult moments at the beginning of my degree. For instance, in the first semester, we started with basic English and that demotivated me. I thought about leaving the degree in the second semester because I felt that I was not too fond of it; I felt like I wasn't learning anything new because I had already learned those subjects in technical high school. *(Sarah's narrative)*

Similarly, Sebastian stated that being a teacher was considered by her not as an intention, but as a tacit possibility among many others:

When I received the notification that I had entered university, I felt the luckiest person in the world since I had been chosen for the degree I wanted and to which I had applied. Honestly, when I started, my expectations were oriented to learn English and be a communication bridge between two languages and between two different cultures. I remember that what made me choose a degree in English was basically my preference for the language. From a very young age, I stood out for being good at English in school and college. Entering the university was overwhelming due to the early morning classes, the treatment of the professors, the cultural and thinking diversity. All of this was something I had to deal with and, in many cases, learn to understand. Being a teacher was not what I had in mind, but I was open to many possibilities, so being a teacher was one of them. I thought it would be a good idea to learn a new language and at the same time learn how to share that knowledge with others. Well, because when one begins on this path to teaching, I am speaking for myself, and from what I have heard from some classmates, I think that most of them, many of us enter wanting to improve our English, right? And with the expectation of the typical American dream, traveling, listening to music in English, and talking to foreign people. *(Sebastian's narrative)*

Finally, Camilo also declared that being a teacher was not in his mind when he started studying the major:

⁵ Imaginaries are understood in this article as a social construct about critical issues occurring within contexts. These imaginaries allow to see possible changes or movements of social phenomena and provide an open horizon for existing social critiques (Adams et al. 2015).

The fact of speaking another language meant the possibility of communicating with almost anyone in the world. I decided to take it to a professional level, which seemed incredible to me, so I decided to do some English courses in a couple of private institutes and see what I could do. One of the reasons I chose to learn English is that it would help me break down my fear of speaking to other people, as I would somehow feel compelled to do so. I felt better and more confident dealing with my classmates. When I realized I liked English and that it was not difficult to learn, I decided to enroll in an English language major. When I received the notification that I had entered the university, I felt satisfied because it was something that I prepared for a long time. The truth is that I did not see myself doing anything else at that time. When I first walked in, I hadn't thought I wanted to be a teacher; I really wanted to learn English and learn it well. (*Camilo's narrative*)

According to these narratives, the main reasons acknowledged by the PELTs for enrolling in the program were related to the English language itself. For Sebastian, the idea of being in contact with people from other countries was fascinating. Their contact with other cultures through languages made him want to perfect the English he learned at school. However, he recognizes that these expectations that arise when learning the language involve the 'American dream', the desire to progress financially, and the desire to get to know other countries. Camilo had a different reason than the other participants: he was not very outgoing, and socializing with people was not his strong suit, so he found in learning languages a way to force himself to interact with others, which encouraged him to continue improving his English skills and led him to decide to enter the ELT education program.

The four PELTs stated that they were really into English, including Karina. She accepted the idea of becoming an English teacher but stressed that she was interested in improving her skills just like the other PELT. Karina said:

I come from a public school, where I became interested mainly in English thanks to my teachers

who inspired me. That made me feel comfortable learning the language, and I was motivated. My interest in a bachelor's degree started when I entered my school's technical high school in the 10th grade. I remember that what prompted me to choose a degree in English was my desire to learn the language more thoroughly. When I received the notification that I had entered the university, I was thrilled because it really was something that I wanted and longed for. Some of the expectations I had when I started my studies were to find other languages besides English, as I had heard that the program offered more than one language. (*Karina's narrative*)

All the narratives indicate that the PELTs felt that language learning was easier for them. They imagined that a degree in English would not be a difficult task. Additionally, the enthusiasm expressed by Sarah shows that, on some occasions, those who enter the English program believe that the level of demand will be very high from the very beginning, but they later realize that this is not always the case. Consequently, these PELTs may be disappointed and even intend to drop out, as happened to Sarah. These situations show that the imaginary that the English education program focuses only on improving the level of English can be counterproductive.

However, although the PELTs entered with the full intention of focusing on improving their English skills and not intending to become teachers, they all wanted to make English part of their professional careers. Camilo, for example, pointed out his satisfaction when he entered the English program, and he projects into the future working with English. Likewise, Karina stated that she had been waiting to enter the English education program for a long time, and that her projections for the future were oriented to learning English and other languages.

(Re)signification of being an English teacher

The first theme showed that PELTs do not consider becoming teachers as their primary professional objective. However, because participants expressed their initial notion of what it meant to be a teacher and how these notions

changed as they progressed through the program, we concluded that their imaginaries and beliefs were subjected to scrutiny through deep reflection on theories and practices, and, therefore, they acquired new meanings.

Most of the initial ideas PELTs had about teaching came from their past experiences at school.

At that time, my opinion about teaching was not complicated by what I had seen from my teachers at school. It was as simple as knowing how to speak English, prepare a class, teach it traditionally as it is done, and that's it. I believed that you did not need to know much to teach a lesson and that classes could be prepared quickly. *(Camilo's narrative)*

Camilo expresses a simplified vision of teaching because that is how he perceived it during his classes. He saw that his role as English teacher was traditional, a transmitter of knowledge who followed a course of action during all classes. This vision of the profession led Camilo to think that it was an easy job, that anyone could do it if they only followed a series of steps. Similarly, Sebastian had a narrow vision of teaching:

I thought that being a teacher was teaching the verb 'to be' without having a plan for it. *(Sebastian's narrative)*

The image here is shared by many PELTs in the country: English language learning helps you to get to know specific structures only. Additionally, Sebastian shows another imaginary: teachers do not need to prepare their classes because they teach the same lesson after lesson. And, although Karina considered that teaching was an important profession, she also showed an initial reductionist view of it:

My opinion of teaching was based on the belief that it is something very important in the lives of all human beings. I thought that, for example, teaching something was only the fact of having knowledge about something and then standing there in front and to teach, and that's it. *(Karina's narrative)*

For Karina, a teacher must know the subject matter he or she is teaching, in this case, English, but then, what they must do is reduced to transmitting it. After PELTs had progressively completed courses in the program, they saw that being a teacher was not just that job in which knowledge is transferred to students. More complex issues emerged, and PELTs reconstructed and (re) signified the meaning of the teaching profession, as their narratives show:

My perception of teaching has changed especially in the pedagogical field. Having a good pedagogical foundation is essential. From my experience in the program and pedagogical practices, I believe that being a teacher is more than giving students knowledge. Teaching has become an enriching experience that contributes to different aspects of life. So, let's say that as one progresses in the career with one semester after semester, one acquires another vision of life, both personally and professionally. Personally, I consider that, beyond giving knowledge to students, teaching work must be full of human and moral skills; by this, I mean to awaken the human and supportive part of the person. I think this is all due to the way I was raised as a child. The experience in pedagogical practice has been fundamental for my professional training as a teacher. Without all the experiences I lived there, without all the advice received, not only by my advisers but also by many people I went to for various circumstances. *(Sebastian's narrative)*

Sebastian began to see teaching as a complex profession that involves knowledge of English and human skills. He recognizes that it is necessary to understand the pedagogical aspects involved in language teaching and to think of students and see them as people who need knowledge and understand how to use it in a more humanistic sense. Likewise, Karina understood, through her experiences in the program, that being a teacher also implies assuming different roles to respond to the needs of the students:

My idea of what it means to be a teacher has changed since I started my studies. I used to think

that being a teacher was a job that not everyone can do; it is something that requires patience, love, creativity, among other things. Since I started the undergraduate program, I realized that being a teacher is that we begin with values because one is not only a teacher, but when one enters a room, one becomes a psychologist, a mediator, a friend, a guide. I believe that being a teacher is one of the most beautiful professions that exists; it is a profession that requires effort and a lot of dedication. It is having a vocation of service to your community. *(Karina's narrative)*

Karina highlighted some other implications of being a teacher: commitment and vocation. Camilo also expressed that this profession is not simple. He stated that teaching is a long-term task, so intricate that, at times, it can be likened to quicksand, from which you can only get out if you have the proper knowledge and apply it in the best way.

But I realized that I was wrong. It was not that easy... Teaching became one of the most challenging yet beautiful jobs out there. It is a constant learning task, mainly because you are dealing with so many people every day. The teaching practice part was perhaps the most difficult. I felt like I was in quicksand. Is it challenging to do the job, and why do it? The truth is that many teachers do it just because they must do it, but doing it right is difficult. *(Camilo's narrative)*

In addition, Camilo warns about some teachers who only teach because they have to, but do not seem to try to do their job well. For Camilo, this is unacceptable, which shows that he understands that being a teacher requires dedication, and that, as Sarah says, it involves many other knowledges.

I thought that an English teacher had to dedicate herself exclusively to teaching grammar and that I could not go further than that. However, I understood that [it] involves many fields, and research is one of them. That is why I would like to work with "Community Based Pedagogy" (...) Over time I learned to love teaching, and now I feel satisfied with what I decided to study (...). *(Sarah's narrative)*

As shown above, the PELTs began to be more aware of the role of the teacher and to connect teaching not only with its instrumental aspects, but also with the critical element that it implies. They recognized problems in their contexts and began to think about contributing in and from their classrooms, involving students simultaneously. Camilo's initial ideas were deconstructed, and the construction of a new idea about what a teacher is also began, along with the construction of his identity. During the transition to this awareness, PELTs begin to become more involved in the teaching profession and see it as something they would like to pursue. This stage works as a consolidation of their teaching identity when they see themselves as protagonists of a social act in which they can influence others. The teaching profession was seen and perceived as a transformative element, which left aside the instrumental elements that were considered in its initial conceptualizations.

Contributions of the ELT education program to the conceptualization of being an English teacher

PELTs described how the positive learning experiences they had during their teacher education helped them become the kind of teacher they are now. Aspects such as being committed, caring, and providing positive learning environments led them to see their teacher educator as role models; a participant described the quality of teacher educators and how they could impact her future teaching career.

I have always felt that the program has very good teachers and when you see them you want to take them as an example... Yes. So, it is like you're taking the academic part, but you also feel like saying Wow! I like their teaching style. I like the way the classes are conducted. I would like to be this way. *(Karina's narrative)*

This idea of role model works not only in elements connected with the teachers. This idea is also related to how they approach the contents in the classroom. These contributions directly affect the development of the PELTs' identity, as they are likely to replicate and adopt some of the elements

they experience during their previous schooling experiences.

The teaching practicum was another important contribution. The PELTs mentioned the positive experience they had, including fears, insecurities, and difficulties. As one of the participants stated,

...at the beginning, I felt very insecure. I did not see myself as the leader of a group leading activities, explaining, and solving doubts for 2 hours or sometimes more. So, the most challenging part for me was the practical part. However, I started to have more confidence, and I felt more comfortable after overcoming those fears. *(Camilo's narrative)*

PELTs saw the practicum as every encounter, together with all the elements they got during their teacher education. The practicum was when they consolidated what being an English teacher really is. It was in a real context, where they could see their role and rethink themselves and strengthen their identity.

The experience in pedagogical practice has been highly essential for my professional teacher education. (...) being exposed to a classroom with genuine students. (...) I think this simple fact has been quite enriching, and I have tried to make the most of every opportunity. *(Sarah's narrative)*

Then, the practicum experiences were the moment when PELTs encountered their place as future teachers. Participants also acknowledge the role of reflection in some of the courses they took during the program, encouraging them to reflect and rethink their teaching.

Research courses such as Research Methodology and Seminar and the last Reflective teaching were really good. I think that you take it when one is doing the teaching practicum because one can reflect on the teaching process that one is carrying out in the teaching practicum. *(Sarah's narrative)*

These courses helped them see and face the realities of their teaching contexts. They were also

opportunities to reflect on their way to approach the issues they experienced in those settings. They understand it was more than just teaching English.

Discussion

In this section, the significance of the three main themes identified in the data is presented considering the main concepts.

Constructed references of being and becoming a teacher

The initial notion of only having specific content knowledge to teach, *i.e.*, you only need to speak English to teach, led the PELTs to select and enroll in the ELT education program only to learn English, minimizing the pedagogical element that these programs have. An instrumental perspective of education was also present as a reference for the PELTs. Their beliefs were based upon preferences and previous schooling experiences; they thought that learning English would help them travel around the world and communicate with other people.

Johnson and Freeman (2001) describe the previous knowledge and experiences teachers take into the classroom and essential elements that shape what they learn. This apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) directly impacts their perceptions of teaching and the construction of their own professional identity (Botha, 2020). Their ideal of education was influenced by the teachers they had during their last years of school. When choosing their careers, they felt that education was concerned with transmitting knowledge (*e.g.*, teaching English is represented as teaching grammar). This idea is a clear representation of the claim made by Macías (2011) about the overemphasis on grammatical forms in English language classes. That was what the PELTs experienced when they were students, which made them prone to have that perspective of language teaching and learning.

(Re)signification of being and consolidation of becoming an English teacher

PELTs (re)signified the instrumentalist viewpoint they held at the beginning of the ELT education

program. They moved toward a critical perspective of the teacher's role. The traditional view of planning and organizing content-based classes, as well as the idea that anyone could teach, changed as they advanced through the ELT education program and completed their teaching practicum. Most of the participants now perceive the teaching profession as one that requires planning, commitment, work, dedication, and understanding teaching in order to contribute to a person's integral formation with quality and meaningful knowledge.

Data analysis reveals the level of commitment that PELTs have regarding teaching as a profession. As previously stated, each PELT had diverse interests when they enrolled in the ELT education program, and being an English teacher was not one of them. As time passed, they started assuming the pedagogical element of the program and establishing their perspective about being a teacher. They express their commitment to teach and adopt different ways to do it, based on their experience in the ELT education program and their teaching experience in the practicum. For these PELTs, ITE showed a positive impact in the construction and (re)signification of being an English teacher, thus moving away from the traditional and prescriptive perspective described by Johnson and Freeman (2001). They could transform the original perspective about teaching that they brought into the program into a more critical view.

The consolidation of the professional identities of the PELTs is also evident. While they were part of one or more communities of practice connected to their profession, they also developed agency as they faced and dealt with difficult situations during their practicum. They overcame these issues and found suitable solutions, thus evidencing their investment to achieve the goal of becoming English teachers. Their identities emerge as they engage in different social activities, and they are in the process of understanding and constructing their relationship with the world (Norton, 2013).

Unveiling the contributions of the undergraduate program

The PELT narratives clearly showed how their teacher identities changed over time. Mifsud (2018)

points out that ELT education programs and teacher educators significantly influence the construction of identity. This fact was evident in the participants' stories. Many of them stated that their desire to become English teachers, not just language users, arose and was strengthened by the image projected by the teacher educators of the program. This reality shows what Norton (2013) and Varghese *et al.* (2005) argued about the discourses as the means for producing a reorganization of interests. The PELTs were exposed to many different discourses related to language learning, which were complemented with pedagogical and didactic ones that were later materialized in pedagogical practices.

Pedagogical practices are another of the outstanding contributions to the construction of PELT identity. However, these practice experiences are insufficient or occur late in the curriculum. For there to be a change regarding the initial knowledge and the imaginations that arise, PELTs must have constant contextualized experiences from the beginning of the program (Borg, 2015).

Conclusions

It is essential to note that these conclusions do not attempt to generalize about the being and becoming of all PELTs. The results presented in this article are part of a larger research project conducted with five different teacher education programs from the school of education at a public university. Therefore, this article focused only on the data and results obtained from four participants in the ELT education program. Additionally, we clarified that the focus of this study was not to make gender distinctions regarding identity during result analysis, but to find aspects of their self and derive from their narratives.

From the four PELTs' narratives, it is clear that the experiences they had in their teaching education constitute a source for (re)signifying their beliefs and constructing their teacher identities. The value of those experiences is essential, given that they involve the process that PELTs undergo during their teaching education. The knowledge that they bring into the program contributes to the quality of ELT

education programs. While the teaching practicum has a noticeable influence on developing their identity, more teaching practicum experiences must be included from the beginning of the program, since PELTs require an understanding of the meaning of teaching.

As teacher educators strongly influence the construction of PELTs' identities, it is necessary to constantly evaluate how they assume language teacher education. This evaluation encompasses an ongoing reflection on what kind of elements and experiences are given to the students. The ideal models or approaches to teaching English and helping them consider the role models of the teacher educators are crucial since many of the schooling experiences that PELTs have during teacher education can shape their future practices. Additionally, language teaching programs need to include elements to help students understand the implications of being a teacher since the beginning of their teacher education. By the end of the undergraduate program, the participants consolidated their identity and become aware of the implications of being an English teacher. Thus, student teachers' experiences in the program could be more prosperous and enlightening for their teacher development.

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