EFL Pre-Service Teachers Storying Their Identities’ Construction as Novice Researchers

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Abstract

This study analyzes what life stories of a group of EFL pre-service teachers reveal about their identities’ construction as novice researchers. They narrated their past actions and decisions, their current feelings and thoughts, and their future expectations regarding research and its relation to their role as future teachers. The instruments used were the participants’ life stories and semi-structured interviews. The analysis showed the impact of narratives on language teaching education, and pre-service teachers’ voices. The three emerging categories were placed in time, as a lifeline framed by past, present, and future experiences or “contextual spaces” (Barkhuizen, 2008). These categories were registered at the level of story where the participant has the opportunity to act and to be an active agent in his closer context being able to build and rebuild his identity.

Keywords: agency, identity, investment, narratives, research identity

Introduction

This study aimed at enabling a group of pre-service teachers to conduct retrospection, interpretation, and prospections on their experiences to articulate them with decision making, challenges analysis and partaking in their formation as active agents (Smith & Sela, 2005). It was a process where they could negotiate and make sense of the construction of themselves (Bullough, 2008).

Having said that, we surveyed and interviewed a group of participants (see appendices A and B) to gather information about their experience and expectations as novice researchers alongside their formation process in the program. Results showed first, that though they had a concept of research, their practice was more imposed than self-initiated (Ubaque & Castañeda, 2017). This situation appeared as an example of the tensions that are found in the language teacher education

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programs when challenging the dichotomy of traditional-alternative education (Quintero, 2016). Second, when asking the participants about the type of research practices that they had conducted, they reported mainly pedagogical interventions where they focused on solving or improving an English language phenomenon. This situation implies that there was a tendency to understand their role as researchers only on methodological terms. This assumption finds justification in Ubaque’s and Castañeda’s (2017) idea, “teachers’ reasons to do research seem to move away from solving classroom problems, [...] and have fallen into simply instrumentalized behaviors of professional practice” (p.40). Third, when the participants were asked about their research skills, they found themselves not ready, not confident to research because they perceived themselves as not skillful due to the lack of knowledge, very few research-based subjects, lack of teachers’ guidance, a little discipline, and difficulties to frame their particular research interests under a problematic situation.

Literature Review

Narratives

“Narrative inquiry is a way of doing research that focuses on the stories we tell concerning our lives. These stories are about our experiences of life; the meaning we make of the events we live or imagine in our future lives” (Barkhuizen, 2016, p.28). Narratives then, house the relevance of unveiling the meaning behind students’ and teachers’ stories to reshape and transform teaching and learning practices that challenge the traditional teacher-centered approach. In the same line of thought, life stories that turn into narratives can benefit teacher education settings (Johnson & Golombek, 2011), as long as they constitute a model of thought. These are understood in this study beyond the structure of beginning, middle, and end (Elliot, 2005), but more importantly as a form of narrative that deserves deep analysis to unveil the meaning the author is building to reflect and act in front of the situations happening in a real context. As part of the research conducted in the national context, Salamanca (2015) in his study claims that ”narratives imply a reflective exercise of remembering, analyzing, and displaying events on a piece of paper. As a result, the narrators make sense of their own lives according to the situations experienced and according to the people that were involved in those events” (p.67). He highlights two important factors; construction and coexistence. Accounting for the former implies that although narratives are based on self-life experiences, they need to be crafted to acquire meaning. In terms of the latter, it suggests that all the events that occurred to a person, are consequently related to the interaction with others who like in a tale, become characters that play a role inside the story. These interactions are an important element in narratives because they allow the storyteller to place in a specific position. Supporting this, Salamanca (2015) exposes, ”narratives reveal who the writers are, how they perceive the world, and how they coexist within their context” (p.68).

Identity
How people imagine themselves in the future relates very much to how they understand who they are in the present… The stories we tell about our lives do not only tell of past experiences, they also locate ourselves and our identities in imagined communities (Barkhuizen, 2013, p.31).

It means that the construction and understanding of identity are reflected in the specific times and spaces where one was, is, but also, where one will be. Time and space then permeate, organize and reshape identities, as in the narratives the events occur in certain times and spaces. Thus, identity is a construct to discuss since it is a consequence of the construction of life stories, a circumstance which is linked to this project because via life stories the participants portray and make sense of their experiences and negotiation processes throughout the research practices to illuminate their identities construction as novice researchers. It suggests that identity construction is an interpersonal process mediated by language and the sociocultural context the person interacts with.

Subsequently, Guerra (2012) asserts that the process of identity formation not only defines individuals to themselves but also others. Norton (2013) supports this idea by saying, “identity is influenced by practices common to institutions such as homes, schools, and workplaces, as well as available resources, whether they are symbolic or material” (p.2). These claims help to connects the discussion with the present project as in this, the participants recognize who they are based on how they face, deal and behave in their contexts, in this case, their participants, research settings, peers, tutors, and teachers who guide their research processes.

**Investment**

Norton (2013) establishes a relationship between the notion of identity and the concept of investment inasmuch it has to do with the compromise and engagement a person has towards a learning process, and how this action talks about the individuals’ identities. This meaning appears as an alternative view to the notion of motivation in the sense that learning goes beyond a psychological dimension and is necessarily permeated by the socio-cultural conditions that surround the learner. Based on the previous statement, Norton (2013) expresses that investment is “a construct that signals the complex relationship between language learner identity and language learning commitment” (p.3) in the same way she says that “investment must be seen within a sociological framework, and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner’s desire and commitment to learning a language, and their complex and changing identity” (p.6).

The value provided by others in the process of investment is conceptualized by Bourdieu (1977) as cultural capital, based on Bourdieu’s (1986) thought, Darvin & Norton (2015) express that “cultural capital refers to knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms” (p.44). These elements are the ones a person puts into consideration and evaluation by others to the acquisition of certain knowledge. Later, Darvin and Norton (2016) claim that “capital is power and it extends from the material/economic to the cultural and social” (p.28), when they talk about power, they immediately talk about positions of power, where based on those positions, some individuals have the authority to value or devalue the learners’ capital.

**Agency**
Bandura (2006) exposes that the reason to exercise agency refers to the desire to acquire specific outcomes that mainly will bring a benefit, (similar to the purpose of investment). However, the agency does not correspond just to the personal dimension but is based or dependent on social and cultural interaction. It appears then as a social and cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). “Most students would testify that the relationships they developed during higher education and the entire social side of the studentship are an important, maybe even the most important, aspect of higher education experience” (Klemenčič & Primožič, 2015, p.19). These relationships suggest a constant development of agency by the participants as there is a set of negotiations with teachers and partners that influence their decisions and actions, which at the same time determine their identity as researchers. Therefore, Sarasa (2017) defines agency as the autonomous capacity to act, feel, and the ability to refuse, and resist. This last assertion has to do with the possibility the participants have to accept or deny what their teachers and context propose to them concerning their research processes. Those actions are helpful to identify the participants’ construction of identity, in this, the case as novice researchers.

Research identity

“Research identity is a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices that grow out of what students already know. The knowledge is complex. The attitudes are positive and inquisitive. The skills and practices are copious and flexible” (Sura, 2015, p.2). The previous concept allows us to understand how complex research and the construction of identity are, however, it is also possible to understand that ELF student-teachers have the abilities and possibilities to be equipped with all these features because of their previous learning experiences, in which they have received formal education and accomplished interaction with others (Sura, 2015). “Being and becoming researchers are shaped by our multiple histories and social and linguistic capital. Our multiple identities position us as researchers in specific ways, crafting particular relationships to participants, communities and the contexts in which we work” (Giampapa, 2016, p.15). The mentioned reflective process to construct a research identity is also organized thanks to and based on certain identities constructed previously by the participants; in this case, the most influential identity the participants already have corresponds to be an ELF student-teacher. Díaz (2013) expresses that “student-teachers portray their identity through the actions and decisions they make at school as a result of their day to day interactions with the context” (p.39) then, it is understood that the identity’s construction as researchers is an important plus to the student-teachers one, both identities are similar in their construction and are crafted in educational contexts.

In agreement with the previous discussion, Fandiño (2010) argues that research on teaching must not be an isolated activity, but that it has to be developed by teachers as well, as a reflective activity because research and teaching have to be an integrated action. Fandiño also express that, “teachers also feel less than confident with the notion of “research,” as they may believe they lack the training to carry out classroom research” (p116) then, these perceptions about how teachers were trained are important to study and understand how was and is tackled research in teacher education programs and how those processes reveal pre-service teachers’ identities’ construction as researchers, and this is what this project attempts to do.

Methodology
Type of study

This study adopted a qualitative paradigm and a narrative approach which allowed us to “elicit, co-construct, interpret, and [...] represent participants' accounts of lived and imagined personal experiences" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p.3). For this study, the written narratives played a twofold role. In the first place, to serve as the raw data and in second place, to be the product to unveil how the participants’ identities were constructed.

Participants and setting

The participants of this study were ten-semester pre-service teachers of a university in Tunja, whose age range was between nineteen and twenty-eight. They agreed to get enrolled in this study and signed a consent letter (see appendix C). This group was part of an English language teacher education program. They were taking a subject called Research Seminar I that can be described as a continuous research preparation course.

Data collection instruments and procedures

The narrative data were elicited and collected through the pre-service English teachers’ written life stories (see appendix D) and semi-structured interviews (see appendix E). They were asked to give sense to their life experiences in regards to research by organizing, reflecting, and informing their decisions and actions. In practical terms, this purpose was achieved through narrative frames which in Barkhuizen’s (2011) words are, “written story templates consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and black spaces of varying lengths. The aim is for participants to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and reflections” (p.402). Fifty life stories were gathered with their corresponding fifty semi-structured interviews from the group of participants for about six months. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were planned after each life story entry to make more sense of the data gathered by allowing the participants to go deeper into their reflections of the events of the story. The two previous instruments were indexed as follows for data organization and analysis processes, life stories (LS), the # of the entry, and the name of the participant; in terms of the semi-structured interviews, it was, (SI), # of the interview and the name of the participant. Additionally, to report the findings of this study, short stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) are excerpts of data extracted from the life stories and the semi-structured interviews and are analyzed in terms of both content and context.

Data analysis methodology

The narrative analysis was the methodology that best served the purpose of this study. In this account, Barkhuizen (2008) proposes two dimensions to put the methodology into practice, content analysis and categorization of themes at both, the content and the context dimensions. In terms of the former, the analysis paid systematic attention to the three intersecting dimensions of narrative: ‘who, where, and when. Accounting for the latter, Barkhuizen (2008) conceives story, Story, and STORY. The first level, the story (in all lowercase) is personal and goes around the inter-personal context of the participant characterized by his ‘inner thoughts, emotions, ideas and the social interactions in their immediate contexts’ (p.8). This was the level of analysis for this study.
Findings

The results took the form of three main categories registered at the level of the *story* as Figure 1 shows, placed in time as a lifeline framed by past, present, and future experiences or what Barkhuizen (2008) calls “contextual spaces”.

In that account, the category of *past stories* symbolizes the first of the three stages of the lifeline the participants are walking to construct their identity as novice researchers. It represents the past for the dimension of *when* proposed by Barkhuizen (2008).

The first subcategory is *off-track subject*, which describes the participants’ identities shaped by their feelings, attitudes, and sense of confusion at the moment of starting the process of conducting research practices. Identity is then a site of struggle as it is changing, readopted, and readapted based on the contexts (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This subcategory is illustrated in some of the participants’ short stories as follows,

I think that my “research experiences” started in my first research seminar in the seventh semester. It was a huge disadvantage because I did not have any knowledge about what was research and anything related to this. So, that was my first biggest challenge, because I felt that everything that my teacher said in the classes, will be a utopia and that I could never have a research proposal. Also, it was difficult when I had to think of an instrument that helped me to identify any problem in a specific population (LS1Friend).

Friend’s identity as an off-track subject is influenced by the lack of previous meaningful research experiences, tackled in the sense that it is until the seventh semester that she realizes that her research process started late. This is a condition for her to say that her research-based knowledge is not strong enough to put the theoretical and practical principles of research into practice. In that account, her identity as a novice researcher is shaped at this initial stage by her resistance to believe that she is capable of achieving both, the objectives of the class and her own. The position of resistance also serves as a site of identity construction because people negotiate tensions, they have at the moment of facing specific situations (Norton, 2013). The following short story also exemplifies the *off-track subject* subcategory,

My first experiences with research were not very good. I remember that when I was younger, I mean as I was 13 years old, I noticed that doing research was not an easy process. It was because I believed it was necessary to know many things and to be very disciplined and very smart. Whereby, one of the requirements for being a good researcher was to be an excellent reader and I did even not like to read. It was something that affects my ideas, my conceptions about research (LS1Afflicted).

In the previous short story, Afflicted reveals to have a predisposition against conducting research which places her in a disadvantaged position because of her previous beliefs and
misconceptions like research as a complex process and just for smart people. In that respect, the participants start becoming aware of the different shapes their selves as researchers are taking. Within this process of research identity construction, the participants also acknowledge less stressful experiences than the ones informed in the upcoming lines.

The second subcategory is called strategic agent, as in here the participants, start to take decisions to conduct actions that favor their identity building as a novice. This strategic agent reflects the initial influence and the role that significant others are playing in the participants' interactive experiences,

to be an agent is to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances. In this view, personal influence is part of the causal structure. People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their behavior. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them (Bandura, 2006, p.164).

Therefore, the participants’ reflections on those strategic decisions and actions taken contribute to the understanding of their identity as novice researchers. These statements are better illustrated in the following short story,

I remembered that I lasted around three weeks building my literature review. Some days, I worked a term a whole day, reading and taking new ideas that contributed to my study. A curious experience with my literature review was that throughout this process, I always felt like a scientist discovering new things in a laboratory with a lot of books and formulations around me. My strategies regarding the building of my literature review were to take each term and to look up at least five or six articles about it. Then, to summarize them and take the key ideas that supported my project. Finally, I added those ideas, in a contextualized form, to my final writing. For this process, I just followed a hard but satisfactory research path created and established by myself (LS3 Poet).

In Poet’s short story his metaphor of the scientist supports Bandura’s (2006) idea about the “self-reflecting” in agent behavior because Poet understands his research activities as a learning opportunity that positions him out of his comfort zone where he rebuilds his identity as a researcher. Also, “intentionality”, which is the first core property of human agency (Bandura, 2006). Finally, in the last lines of his short story, Poet recognizes that thanks to those previous actions he has started to build a research path where he is the principal walker. The following short story also serves the purpose of the discussion of this subcategory,

I wanted to implement some things to improve the environment of the tutoring sessions, in that sense, the best option was to do a case study in which we analyze the problem from almost outside without implementing things to improve the environment of the population, it was suggested by my evaluator and also by my director so I decided to implement it like this, after that, we decided to change a little bit the project and the instruments and all the procedures but in the real sense of the project, it is almost the same, just in that aspect. (SI4 Half-hearted).

Half-hearted’s identity reveals the inherent need for interaction with others (Peirce, 1995). This shows that although the actions and decisions taken by the participant are individual and personal, he started to display the need for interaction, which is a clear and understandable idea as identity construction is performed in a social way (Norton, 1995).

The third subcategory, passive agent in power relationships evidences the influence of the pre-service teachers’ teacher educators as closer actors who guide, listen and advise them while researching subjects related to it. Therefore, “social structures are frequently inequitable; that is,
there are people and social structures that have more value or power than others” (Barkhuizen, 2016, p.31) In that sense, in the particular context of this study, the teachers are in a more privileged position of power than the EFL prospective teachers in an intellectual way. However, many times this relation can appear as inequitable for the pre-service teachers as their capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is not capitalized, valued, and considered by their teachers. It makes the participants project themselves as passive agents because they feel they are not being encouraged, helped, neither guided by the teachers so they resign to do what the teachers say or in other cases give up their research purposes. In that sense, “those who find themselves in disempowered positions are denied access to the very resources they need or desire to become successful” (Barkhuizen, 2016, p.31). These factors are elucidated in the following short story, 

In this semester, in the second research seminar, things have changed a bit. I think that unfortunately, I have not progressed in my research proposal. I know that each teacher has his/her way of teaching a subject and with my teacher of this seminar, things have changed, we did not continue with the process that we had. This is a disadvantage because in the last semester we could advance a lot, but now we are stuck. Another thing that I want to mention is that, when I showed my research proposal made in the first seminar to my new teacher, he changed many things of it, and although I tried to defend my point of view, I had to do what my teacher said because if not, my grade would be affected. For that reason, I think that now, there are more challenges than opportunities. As students, we have to accept what our teachers say and think. (LS1 Friend).

Friend’s image as a novice searcher is shaped by the relationship of power she is having with a significant other in her subject. That relationship positions her in a not privileged place as she feels that she cannot negotiate and that the knowledge acquired previously which was materialized in her research proposal is not capitalized by her new teacher. Then, as the mentor does not value such capital (Bourdieu, 1986), she gets frustrated, resigns, and projects herself as a passive agent who does what the teacher says despite the project is hers and does not agree with the teachers’ commentaries. This Friend’s attitude has to do with Compliance the second dimension of power relationships which refers to the following parameters but with an apathetic behavior to avoid possible recriminations from the teacher (Yulk, 2002). The next short story also evidence this image as a passive agent,

In my experience as a pre-service teacher and researcher, I saw that the challenges are more than the opportunities that we have to research. It means, the opportunities can be presented in some subjects that curricula propose for our carrier, however, we also are exposed to find teachers that don’t have the passion for the investigation. It can be one challenge for us at the moment to try to research. For instance, in my case, I think that in the first semesters I didn’t know anything about research and all the processes that it implies, but some semesters ago, specifically two, I start to immerse myself in that hard process and I like it… unfortunately, this semester the research process stops because I met some teachers that seem they don’t like research or maybe they don’t know how to do it. This experience is a little frustrating because as a beginner researcher I think that I need to be guided in some aspects that I don’t know yet, and I expected to receive this guide or knowledge from the teachers. But in general, research is amazing (LS1 Soft Stone)

Soft Stone presents herself as a passive agent in the sense that her interactions with teachers have been permeated by the lack of guidance and support. She recognizes she is a novice researcher, she is already aware of her capacities and necessities, thanks that, she places herself in a non-weak position as a researcher but, a position where she still needs to be guided by her teachers, nonetheless, as this guide does not occur, she is projected as a passive agent in the way
she decides to stop her process based in the teachers’ influence. It finds justification in Mercer’s (2012) words as she states that decisions and actions on the part of the learner are “interrelated with contexts at different levels ranging from broader contexts such as the socio-cultural and educational contexts through family and classroom contexts down to the level of immediate interactional contexts” (p.44). In this account, the relationships she is establishing with her teachers appear to influence the way she acts and the way she understands herself as a researcher.

The fourth subcategory partaker in power relationships appears as the counterpart of the previous discussion. It represents the form the identity of the participants as novice researchers take when they get involved in more equitable interactions with significant others like their teacher-educators, tutors, peers, among others. “Identity is constructed and co-constructed by one-self and others bearing in mind the way social dynamics are developed and what the different roles individuals assign or are assigned according to specific situations are” (Gómez, 2012, p.62). In this subcategory, the factors that characterize the participants’ identity are based on the constant encouragement, guidance, help, support, and validation of the capital the participants receive from the significant others’ side. These factors are elucidated in the following short story,

I want to highlight that my literature review would not have been possible without the support of my teacher of Research Seminar I. She was my light in that dark tunnel where I felt lost in the research context. I did not know what to do in that stage of my study. So, my teacher guided me and advised me to establish, as a first step, a series of constructs that were the main stone to build the literature review. She also provided me an excellent sample about it, in this way, my research self-confidence increased. In other words, the decisions and actions that I took to build the literature review were based on the support of my teacher (LS3 Poet).

Based on this meaningful encouragement, the participant feels more confident to continue making good decisions and actions with themselves as novice researchers. This attitude the participant assumes finds justification on Yulk’s (2002) definition of the first perspective of power Commitment as it occurs when the person obeys the orders of the leader without any objection because as in this case he considers it empowers him and keeps him advancing making decisions and taking actions regarding his research process. In the next short story, it is evidenced the other noteworthy influence participants receive along their process of identity construction as researchers,

I consider that my partner was very significant in the process of building the lit review because some ideas that she gave me made me clarify my doubts about some or certain topics and in other times I propose my ideas for the building of that lit review and also when maybe I felt her not just as a partner but also as a friend because maybe when I felt frustrated about some topics or when we did not found the information, she helped me and guide me how to continue. I think that working in pairs can help to create different results in the way the concept that I find could be different (SI3 Soft Stone).

Soft Stone projects her identity as a novice researcher in a more agentic dimension as she is in a social relationship with a peer where her and her friends’ capital is mutually valued. This occurs using what (Norton & Toohey, 2001) define as the agreements that take place in power relationships through negotiation of meaning. The participant expresses that being with a partner is more favorable and meaningful for her development as it occurs not only at the academic
dimension but also, at the personal one. Then, she places herself as a partaker in the way her ideas were capitalized, considered and this allowed her to feel more powerful and useful in that relationship.

Following the discussion of the findings of this study, the description, illustration, and analysis of the second category are presented here. This is called the present story, which is placed in the middle stage of the lifeline the participants walk during their identity construction process as novice researchers, this category is also understood under the dimension of when proposed by Barkhuizen, (2008). As this stage is organized in the present as portrayed in the participants’ life stories it is important to highlight that the action and decisions the participants take right now, are based on the ones made in the past and will have a repercussion for the future about their identity construction as researchers. Their identity then is built and rebuilt across time, (Peirce, 1995).

Then, the context reader is the subcategory illustrating this second category. The image projected by the participants in the context reader has to do with the view they have of themselves as researchers, as they can read, understand, and be empathetic with contexts and populations. Thanks to the contact with those settings, the participants understand and present more critically their roles as researchers and the importance of their contexts to learn and get meaningful experiences for the construction of their identity. The previous factors are illustrated in the upcoming short stories,

I know that I can learn different things about the context and I can achieve goals and I can help to a specific context depending on the problem of the different things that involve it so I know that I can learn from that context and that context can learn something about me or something that I can offer to them to the context just because I have tools to do it (SI 2 Foreigner).

Foreigner is always referring to a present time as she is in the middle of that interactive process with her setting, she is establishing a dependent relationship with the population in a particular context as this can have a great impact on the personal identity construction process (Yeh, 2017). Then, her image as a context reader is revealed when she recognizes it as a potential source of knowledge and mutual encounter.

I have learned to catch every single detail about my process as a future teacher and my students, to work on my weaknesses and my students' weaknesses, for sure, it is a huge process, but I think that the most important thing is to start to see beyond than just "simple" classes because each session and each group teach me and show me something different. I think that one of my weaknesses is that I want to work on everything that I see, I would like to change everything quickly, but I am conscious that research implies a process and most of the time it is a long process, that is why, I would like to work on my research side because that allows me to improve my role as a teacher and also, it allows me to see teaching from different perspectives (LS5 Known)

Known presents herself as a context reader as she recognizes to have a social responsibility as a teacher based on the particular characteristics of the setting. At the same time, she wants to improve in her research capacities as the best way to contribute to others. “The purpose of learning should be related to real-life tasks to benefit individuals’ learning and to foster the capacity to contribute to society” (Yeh, 2017, p.21). Moreover, she remarks on the future and how what she is doing will affect later her identity as a researcher.
The future story is the third category has to do with Norton’s (1997) idea of identity. She says that people’s identity is also reflected in the way they project themselves for the future and who they want to become based on the reflection they do along their trajectories and previous experiences in their construction of identity. Then, this level of the participants’ lifeline corresponds to that anticipated future they imagine concerning both, their role as novice researchers and as future EFL teachers. From the participants’ narratives, two subcategories emerged.

*Agent of change* is the first subcategory, here the participants reveal their compromise to the context they have contact with as researchers and how this image informs their future teaching practices and the understanding of their possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). In this account, the participants’ identity as agents of change is mediated by the social context as it becomes the environment where they want to exert certain processes of transformation. The following short stories illustrate the described subcategory,

I have the idea that the rural and the populations who live in towns have many needs and have too much to offer us as researchers and as teachers so we can learn too much about those students and I noticed in my teaching practices that they can understand and they can learn too much but many times they don’t have many opportunities or they don’t have the best ways to access to English knowledge so I decided to choose that context because I consider that we as researchers have a social responsibility so it implies to bear in mind different contexts and their needs and to think about how we as teachers and researcher can improve and can offer other strategies or other opportunities to invite them to learn English and to avoid stereotypes that they have related to English that difficult their learning and the idea that they have about English and English teachers (SI 2 Afflicted).

Afflicted’s short story evidences the relationship between the present story category and the future one because to be an agent of change, Afflicted needs to be a context reader first. She reflects on the possibilities (Norton, 2013) she has to change and improve her context as she notes that there are needs in there and that she possesses the capacities to contribute to meet them. Besides she recognizes it as an opportunity to exert her social responsibility as a hand-in-hand process between teaching and research. The following short story keeps illustrating the identity of the participants as agents of change.

teachers must be prepared regarding great features, pedagogy, and research, for example in my case if do not carry out a research process in my role as a future language teacher, I would be a normal teacher who would not help or change the different concerns that emerge from the educational context. A teacher is a researcher and for me, the previous statement is a kind of commandment in this profession, besides being a teacher means being an agent of changes and for those changes, it is essential to research to identify something and trying to find solutions all this to improve our learners’ context. Without research, I would be a kind of incomplete teacher (LS5 Poet).

Poet gives a pivotal role to research as a dimension that informs and qualifies his situated performance as a future teacher committed to meet the needs and characteristics of his potential contexts of practice. He also presents himself as a content agent of change because he does not perceive himself as a normal professional in the future, but as a novice researcher capable of transforming his learners’ context. In this respect, ‘every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self with the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space’ (Norton, 2010, p.350).
American Journal of Humanities and Social Science (AJHSS) Volume 23, 2021

Constant learner appears as the second subcategory of the future story category, it consolidates the final part of an ongoing process in the lifeline of the participant’s identity construction as novice researchers. This is characterized by their investment, commitment to keep learning, and their awareness of what their strengths and aspects to improve are. They find themselves in a learning atmosphere that empowers and encourages them to enrich their profile and get those gains they expect. “How future teachers narrate their negotiation of different forms of temporal investments in their education curriculum are directly related to their agentive construction within their process of identity formation” (Sarasa, 2017, p.30). The following short stories illustrate the last subcategory,

As a pre-service teacher, I feel I have to learn a lot of things about research, although the process in the research seminars I am still poor about the topic. I need to get more engaged with what is research and I think that as being a teacher I have the best opportunity for becoming a better researcher. Perhaps I will need help, doubts will appear and it could be good if I had someone who goes to for help. In that way, I know that I need continuous studying and learning about research. By now I know how to begging that is an important thing (LS5 Brief)

Brief’s short story is understood under the image of a constant learner as she knows conducting research is a process that requires time. She places herself in the present time, but thinking about the future and recognizing all the things that she has to improve about research. In that sense, a “learner’s investment is oriented towards an imagined identity that is perceived as enriching one’s capital” (Nasrollahi, 2018, p.88).

Maybe to be honest I am scared right now because I don’t know how it is going be and that will be on my own and at my school, but I don’t know, I have to do it and if I have to do it, I will do it in the best way that I can do it so, I hope that that classroom project will be good and will be the proof to myself that I can do a research project and that I can do more things and that I am a researcher because if I don’t finish a research project I am not a researcher but the next semester I have to do it, I will do it and until that point, I will be a researcher, that is what I think (SI 5 Pal).

In the previous short story, the participant expresses her desire to act and complete a thesis to feel more comfortable with herself as a researcher. She is willing to change the unpleasant situation in which she is now and to turn it into a meaningful one as she emphasizes her intellectual investment to complete a meaningful learning process. She places in the present, to think and reflect about what could happen in the future. Then, identity is organized when there is an understanding about how to think and act looking for the best options and possibilities based on a specific situation, (Darvin & Norton 2016).

Conclusions

A group of EFL pre-service teachers wrote their life stories in an introspective and reflective way to reveal their identities’ construction as novice researchers. It allowed these participants to understand their research identified as a lifeline guided by past, present, and future experiences framed by their immediate contexts or communities at the level of the story.

The first category called the past story is placed under the when dimensioning and the inner story approach level story (Barkhuizen, 2008). It illustrates the different images the participants built in their past, they saw themselves as off-track subjects, strategic agents, partakers in power

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The second category called the present story is the middle stage in the life-line of the participant identities’ construction. It illustrates how novice researchers placed themselves in a more powerful position where they can be able to understand and be empathetic with the context. The image the participants portray here is the context reader. It represents the characteristics the participants identified of themselves as investigators at the moment of conducting research practices and how these could influence either their present or future.

The third and last category in this lifeline is the future story, it demonstrates how the participants project themselves for the future and who they want to become based on the reflection they have made along with their previous experiences. Then, this level of the participants’ lifeline corresponds to that anticipated future they see. The images they projected were agents of change and constant learners. These have to do with the participants’ capacity, responsibility, desire, learning commitment, intentional choices, and desires for their future practices as novice researchers and future teachers.

Based on what has been stated above, the pedagogical implications that emerge from this study are first, the potential of narratives in the process of voicing the pre-service teachers’ views, ideas, beliefs, actions, experiences, etc. And second, the role narratives can play in-field practices to potentiate the students’ capital and the contexts’ assets.

References


Appendices

Appendix A. Survey

Objetivo: estimado participante, esta encuesta busca recopilar información sobre su experiencia y expectativas como investigador en formación a lo largo del programa. La información es totalmente confidencial y con fines meramente académicos e investigativos.

Edad ____________________________  semestre ____________________________

Sección I: información académica

¿Cuántas materias se encuentra cursando? ________________________________

¿Cuáles de ellas considera que están relacionadas con investigación? ¿Por qué?

¿Qué significa para usted investigar?

¿Considera que la investigación es importante? ¿Por qué?

Marque con una x la frecuencia con la que se abordan los siguientes términos en su ámbito académico:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Términos</th>
<th>Siempre</th>
<th>Casi siempre</th>
<th>De vez en cuando</th>
<th>Casi nunca</th>
<th>Nunca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigación</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proyectos</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encuestas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artículos académicos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observaciones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marque con una x los conceptos sobre los que tiene conocimiento

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entender paradigmas de investigación</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realizar observaciones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desarrollar un proceso diagnóstico</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmarcar una pregunta de investigación</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sección II: Experiencia investigativa**

¿Qué tipo de procesos investigativos ha llevado a cabo?

¿Cuáles han sido las habilidades que estos procesos investigativos han potenciado en usted?

¿Se siente preparado actualmente para construir una propuesta de investigación que se convierta en su tesis? Sí _____ No _____ ¿Por qué?

¿Sobre qué temáticas le gustaría desarrollar su propuesta de investigación?

**Appendix B. Interview**

Objetivo: estimado participante, esta entrevista busca profundizar en la información que usted suministró sobre su experiencia y expectativas como investigador en formación. La información es totalmente confidencial y con fines meramente académicos e investigativos.

¿Podría describir la forma en la que las asignaturas que usted informó desarrollaban procesos investigativos?

¿Por qué razón cree que hay aspectos investigativos que no se trabajan suficientemente?

¿Cómo informan los procesos investigativos desarrollados en el Programa la visión que tiene de sí mismo como docente investigador?

¿Qué tipo de iniciativas pedagógicas le gustaría llevar a cabo? ¿Por qué?

¿Cuáles son los retos que representa para usted la idea de convertirse en un docente investigador?

¿Cuáles son las oportunidades que representa para usted la idea de convertirse en un docente investigador?
Appendix D. Life story entry #1

Dear participant, writing a life story may be a new experience for you, but this is a good exercise that can help you reflect about yourself, your behavior, your environment and your thoughts in a specific situation of your life.

You will be required to complete an entry every other week. Keep in mind that you are the chief character of this process so I will be opened to listen and talk to you. To start with, you are expected to describe a detailed way the following statement:

Reflect about challenges and opportunities you have faced throughout your research experiences designing your research project.

If you get any doubt or question, do not hesitate to contact usmarad97@hotmail.com leidy.chacon@uptc.edu.co

Thanks a lot,

Appendix E: Semi-structured interview format #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview number</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>April 19th 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>“My friend”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You told in the entry,
“I decided to use that context, because I have always heard that many people attend these levels of English by obligation, and when they enter the university, they expect that this subject is not present in their curriculum. Also, because I had a similar experience, when I had to study four levels of French and I did not like it; for that reason, I was not interested in those classes and only attended by obligation”.

Answer the following question:
What does this idea reflect about your profile (characteristics) as a Researcher?