

Experiences of an EFL Pre-Service Teacher at Distance that construct her
Identity.

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A research report submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés

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Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés
Decanatura de División de Educación Abierta y a Distancia
Facultad de Educación
Bogotá, July 14, 2022

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Abstract

The present autobiographical study under the narrative inquiry approach depicts the life story of an English pre-service teacher at distance education, before and after living abroad to determine how experiences have shaped her personal and professional identity. It is the story of an English pre-service teacher who was born and raised in Colombia, who had experiences such as having had difficulties learning English at school, or having had to travel to the United States twice, once with the Au-pair program and the other as a tourist. She decided to stay there due to different circumstances but continued studying a degree in English at Santo Tomas University at distance modality. This study describes how to learn in a distance modality, and had to go through difficult situations that made her stronger.

The researcher followed inquiry research and after an information analysis decoding process, two categories emerged: **category 1:** Personal-focused development. With the sub-categories: Sub-category 1: Religion, sub category 2: Family support, sub-category 3: Violence, sub-category 4: Resilience (Arte, Medical support) and **category 2:** Academic-focused development with the sub-categories: sub-category 1: Autonomy (self-learning) and independence, sub- category 2: English and travel to the USA, sub-category 3: Research -skills development. This story is worth telling because when it is written, it is added to the web of knowledge in this field and it can help better understand (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Additionally, these valid experiences reach important conclusions that add to the investigations of Identities in English pre-service teachers.

Keywords: narrative, identity, language learning, pre-service teacher, living abroad.

Resumen

El presente estudio autobiográfico bajo el enfoque de investigación narrativa describe la historia de vida de una docente en formación en la modalidad a distancia, antes y después de vivir en el exterior para determinar cómo sus experiencias han formado su identidad personal y profesional. Esta es la historia de una futura maestra de Inglés que nació y se crió en Colombia, que tuvo experiencias como dificultades en el aprendizaje del Inglés en la escuela, o tener que viajar a los Estado Unidos dos veces, la primera vez en el programa de Au-pair y la segunda vez como turista, decidiendo quedarse en los Estados Unidos por diferentes circunstancias mientras seguía estudiando su carrera de licenciatura en Inglés en la universidad Santo Tomás con modalidad a distancia, teniendo que atravesar situaciones difíciles las cuales la hicieron más fuerte.

La investigadora siguió una investigación de indagación y después de un proceso de descodificación de análisis de información, surgieron dos categorías: **categoría 1:** Desarrollo

centrado en la persona. Con las subcategorías: Subcategoría 1: Religión, subcategoría 2: Apoyo familiar, subcategoría 3: Violencia, subcategoría 4: Resiliencia (Arte, Apoyo médico) y **categoría 2: Desarrollo con enfoque académico** con las subcategorías: subcategoría 1: Autonomía (autoaprendizaje) e independencia, subcategoría 2: Inglés y viajes al EE. UU., subcategoría 3: Investigación - desarrollo de habilidades.

Esta historia es digna de contar porque cuando se escribe sobre estos temas, se está sumando a la telaraña del conocimiento en este campo de estudio y puede servir de ayuda para entender mejor los mundos mentales internos de los profesores y estudiantes de idiomas como una actividad social y educativa. (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Adicionalmente, estas son experiencias válidas llegan a conclusiones importantes.

Palabras clave: Narrativa, identidad, aprendizaje de idiomas, profesor en formación, vivir en el extranjero.

1. **Problem statement**

The following autobiographical study under the narrative inquiry approach tells the story of an English pre-service teacher who lived her first years of life between Bogota and Facatativá. In 2014, she started studying in Bogota at the Santo Tomas University. Then, she decided to travel to New York, United States with an Au Pair program in 2016, returning to her country just 4 months later, but she traveled back to the United States in 2018 to New York. Thereafter, she moved to California where she finished her studies. The inquiry will reflect on how an English pre-service teacher has built her identity in an English-speaking country. As will be discussed, the process of studying at distance and living in an English-speaking country gives the opportunity to shape her identity.

The research inquiry considers not only their own personal reflections but also the perspectives of those close to her, in this case, relatives, university classmates, and teachers of the bachelor's program. By increasing the objectivity of the inquiry and giving alternative perspectives the investigation will be enriched. As well as enable the integration of new information and additional reflections previously unknown to the researcher.

Conducting this investigation is pertinent for Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras – Distance Modality at Universidad Santo Tomás, subproject 2. *The voices of the LLEI realities, life stories and experiences* gives a voice to life stories about a pre-service teacher's identity and the specific components the researcher wants to investigate, such as identity construction, the influence of living abroad while finishing a Bachelor's Program, and how pre-service teachers can develop research skills in the construction of their final paper.

Within this thesis, the researcher has reflected upon her identity as how she sees herself and how others see her, personally and professionally. The intention is that this inquiry will be of interest and valuable to other pre-service teachers as they will identify with the perspective of the pre-service teacher in question. Highlighting the relevance of self-knowledge and identity can support pre-service teachers who have not lived the same experiences abroad or reflected upon the relevance of identity in shaping teacher processes. This inquiry is intended to improve other teachers in how they interact with their students. Barkhuizen (2017) notes that reflection on one's own identity development when they experience identity-enhance processes such as education abroad has a significant impact on teacher behavior in the classroom, personal beliefs about teaching, and the prescribed roles in the classroom. However, many teachers do not have the opportunity to experience these identity-shaping processes themselves. By sharing insights learned from this inquiry, the researcher sets out to enhance the process of these teachers and colleagues in Colombia.

As well as having value for other teachers and colleagues, the process is meaningful for the researcher herself. As the inquiry process allows for the personal reflection on herself and her interaction with others. This point is made strongly by Barkhuizen who states that such narrative inquiries are impactful in enhancing the teacher's own development (Barkhuizen, 2021).

Finally, as well as demonstrating the impact of the positive personal reflections of a pre-service teacher abroad it also highlights the corresponding challenges. These highlighted challenges can be used as examples and guidance for pre-service teachers or English students who are moving to other countries or simply want to reposition themselves and their own processes within their own country.

1.2 Research question

How do distance education and living abroad experiences shape the personal and professional identity of a language pre-service teacher in a B. A. program in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language?

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 General objective

To reflect on the life story experiences of an English pre-service teacher while learning at distance education and living abroad.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- To describe distance education and living abroad experiences of a pre-service teacher that are part of the construction of her personal and professional identity of a pre-service teacher.
- To recognize how life experiences have shaped the EFL pre-service teacher's personal and professional identity.
- To analyze how the EFL pre-service teacher's life experiences in a local context and abroad become part of the construction of her personal and professional identity.

2. Literature review

The constructs developed in the present chapter emerged from the research question. The first construct is related to distance education, due to the context the study is framed. The second construct is the identity that pre-service teachers formed through everyday experiences, and the third construct is related to studying and living abroad experiences that aims to show examples of how students learn as a second language or a foreign language both inside and outside the country.

2.1 Distance Education.

Distance education is a modality of learning where students are not necessarily required to be physically present at an institution, helping students to be able to have freedom of time, and place, promoting self learning with traditional and current methodologies interactions. Barberá (2013), expresses that distance education has a formal connotation, where students could be separated from teachers and physical classrooms using resources as technology to share resources and connect each other.

Another definition could be Salazar and Melo (2013)

Distance education is a set of pedagogical relationships between students, teachers, and the institution, supported by the use of technologies for the systemic development of quality training processes. This educational modality promotes inclusion and social mobility, based on autonomous learning and self-management, which uses technological, pedagogical, and didactical diverse methodologies,

mediations, and strategies (...) and certification of the educational service and comprehensive training. In this modality, the student can access without concern geographical barriers, time, age, gender, race, ethnicity, religious creed, conditions political, social, cultural, learning, or nationality (p.102).

In addition, Dr. Ekmekçi E. (2014) states students prefer distance education because "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs". Distance education helps students who can not attend face-to-face classrooms because they live far away from the physical environment or they need a flexible schedule because they work full time, etc but having face-to-face meetings to enrich their learning processes. Or in circumstances as the researcher who lives in The United States but is able to continue coursing her high education in the Santo Tomas university in Colombia with tutoring sessions online through zoom or other technological platforms. Noteworthy, The education system was affected globally because (COVID-19) pandemic, making the online tutoring sessions more used than the face to face meetings at distance education.

Santo Tomas university has been characterized for being the first high-level university with distance education modality in Colombia, offering the student the possibility of not leaving their environment from urban to countryside regions. Bejarano (2004) states the following:

For Santo Tomas University, distance education is an educational modality that allows the student to follow an academic program using different means and technologies that allow direct access to knowledge without the need of the daily or very frequent face-to-face relationship with the teacher in a physical space (p.28).

Santo Tomas University has specialized distance educators who are willing to help and answer questions quickly through e-mail or organize additional personalized tutoring when students require it. Santo Tomas University has virtual mediation on-line with face to face sessions with differences of intensity, method and number of credits depending on the program. Some academic spaces require more tutoring sessions, some others are fully virtual using different feedback strategies.

2.2 Identity

Identity can be defined as the understanding of one's own relationship with society or the world as well as the structure of that relationship (Norton, 2013; as cited in Barkhuizen, 2017). These are thoughts that are in our minds, and we decide to believe them or not, all those thoughts are like bricks to build step by step an identity and they are being shaped through their relationship with others (Dweck, 2006). As the bible said in proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (The Bible of New International Version, 2011, p.452). In conclusion, identity is a subjective understanding of the world that is molded by experiences and personal decisions. But also, the result of interaction with others.

In this sense, Identity is also about how others perceive us and how we perceive ourselves because it is formed through the perspective of others and through our own re-interpretation of this perspective. This process is continuous as it changes as we experience the world and interact with those around us (Barkhuizen, 2017). Those thoughts, beliefs, everyday decisions, relationships with others, and how we react to life experiences have shaped different identities. Moreover, identities are diverse and dynamic rather than singular and concrete. In other words, identities can take many forms and change constantly. This makes a singular definition of what comprises a given identity counterproductive and unnecessary. Rather, the key question to ask is how these different identities influence and integrate with one another (Barkhuizen, 2017).

In this research, different identities of the researcher are treated broadly and meditate on how they are interconnected with self-analysis and third parties' perspectives on life achievements, the effects, and the impacts of the different experiences, contributing to more information on EFL pre-service teachers' identity investigations. For instance, it is crucial to analyze all the aspects that the subject of this literature review has gone through as a pre-service teacher. Also, the effect and the role of personal identity on the transition to professional life. Keeping in mind that personal identity enables individuals to guide themselves through a powerful sense of self-resilience to face future adversity (Hochstetler, 2011), the researcher seeks to identify how she and others perceive her and thus have a powerful sense of self-knowledge for future experiences.

2.2.1 Language Pre-service teacher identity

Before explaining what Pre-service teacher identity is, it is important to understand what it is referred to as Pre-service teacher. It is a person who is studying to be a teacher but he\she is not exercising his\her career yet. Pre-service teacher identity is formed in the constant reflection of thinking about classes, their own role in the classroom etc, that add up to the moment of learning or teaching (Barkhuizen, 2017). Also, all those experiences make each teacher unique, and it shapes identity in each context, since it is not in one place, but is formulated by all aspects of oneself whether that be our cognitive or social selves (Barkhuizen, 2017). Besides, this identity will be continually changing because the new experiences will allow us to see the world differently.

In this sense, It is clear to many language teacher educators, as shown by the study carried out by Barkhuizen in Colombia about the importance of teaching the future students their positioning an identity (Barkhuizen et al., 2017; Hochstetler 2011).

Consequently, Barkhuizen (2021) research shows the case of ‘Juan’, an LTE (language teacher educator) who expresses his worries about his students being prepared to become teachers without knowing what they are really studying. In other words, he believes his students do not know what it really means to become an effective and supportive teacher, particularly an English teacher. In this realm, a project role model is important for an educator. A project role model can enable a teacher to have two key aspects to their processes - intentionality and goal-directedness. This means motives and intentions should be included specifically directed toward learning goals. Unfortunately. The economy of a given country can have an impact on the identity and position of teachers (Barkhuizen, 2021; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; as cited in Barkhuizen, 2021).

Furthermore, Considering not just economic context but also the social environment and interactions with others is crucial for TI (teachers' identities) because as we stated previously, identities are built from interaction with those around us. Another factor impacting the identity of teachers is their fellow teachers around them. Pre-service teachers or teachers creating connections or feeling like part of a group from the same group is essential to both feel belonging and increase the quality of performance. Included within the process, is the sharing of information particularly amongst those with greater experience. Fortunately,

Santo Tomas University through spaces like the “Research Mentorship Program” encourages students to be part of research communities in the country but also puts a particular emphasis on the development of identity by speaking about culture and Identity as “language and cyberculture” or “language and cultural awareness” subjects, among others. Where the teacher educators give a global perspective, and this is pivotal because all types of teachers can express various parts of their personality and make-up in a variety of contexts (Barkhuizen, 2017; Xu Y, 2017).

In this case, according to Barkhuizen (2017) language, and teacher identity arises out of two factors, namely, “personal biography” and “local socio-educational contexts”. In other words, to the personal affective state of an individual or to contextually relevant external factors. The inside/outside relationship of teacher identity works together not against each other.

2.3 Studying and living abroad

Studying abroad is when a person decides to travel to another country with the intention of accomplishing and taking a course in a foreign country because they believe this experience will enrich their academic and personal purposes. It is really common for students who want to learn a foreign country language, such as the researcher who traveled for the first time in the Au-Pair program to learn more about the United States’ culture, English language and work at the same time. But the second time, she aimlessly deciphered on the way what she was presented with, only having the objective of leaving her country for personal problems.

In this sense, Studying abroad can be divided into different models. Isabelli-García & Isabelli (2019) explain the “U.S. Student Model”. It is that universities and colleges of the United States encourage students to study abroad typically in short programs in which the host country has similar academic structures. Santo Tomas university in Colombia has these exchange scholarships programs, many times offering help for tickets, accommodation and food during the 4 months that the exchange usually lasts. Another model that Isabelli-García & Isabelli (2019) explain is the “International Student Model”. Where the students attend an

abroad country and the financial support comes from the host university or themselves normally taking exams like TOEFL and others.

However, there is another model that the researcher wants to show and highlight, that is students who study at distance education in their own countries, but for different circumstances they have to travel abroad and continue their studies in their university in their host country. It is the case of different students in the Santo Tomas University specially in *Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés* in a distance modality, who decide to travel abroad to pursue a proficient English level as Cárdenas (2022) expresses “the fact that she was not obligated to speak the language outside the classrooms kept her in her comfort zone. As a result, her language production and performance within B.A. tasks and other environments were poor” (p. 30) this is why some students look for alternatives such as living and studying abroad to be immersed in the language.

In addition, pre-service teachers can decide to live abroad often with the hope or expectation that an immersion in the requisite culture and host language will naturally result in that language being incorporated into their identity because cultural interactions and cultural exposure together have a dramatic influence on the self and perception around one’s position in society but also this can expose them to an emotional rollercoaster, becoming ‘prisoners of their own minds’ with feelings of despair and isolation Conley, C. (2012) All those feelings of positives and negatives can give them access to an inner strength of which the subject may not previously have been aware. Differences (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, social class) can vary the experiences of pre-service teachers in their cultural experience in an abroad country (Conley, 2012; Barkhuizen, 2017).

Moreover, another way in which the mental health of a student is affected is by their behavioral adaptation in a new environment. This looks at to what extent a student adapts to their new surroundings. Increased levels of behavioral adaptation in a new environment is associated with the learning of new skills. If a student can adapt themselves successfully within a new culture this limits the extent to which they feel isolated and ultimately will decrease the likelihood of anxiety (Savicki, 2013). The evidence for the effect of behavioral adaptation is further supported when it is looked at the influence of two mood groups, (those with a high mood and those with a low mood) Students with a typically low mood are more

likely to report a reluctance to engage in the language of the host country. This is by a factor of 30 percentage points (Savicki, 2013).

3. Research design

Narrative inquiry is the process by which humans interact with the world, the exercise of narrating verbally or through writing gives the opportunity to immortalize a moment and be able to analyze, learn, and dig deeper into one's thoughts. This is the way how human knowledge is built. Clandinin and Connelly affirm that narrative inquiry has a significant impact on personal knowledge acquisition and formulation (as cited in Chan, 2017; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). To reiterate, narrative inquiry is crucial to understand the inner mind of the language teachers and the social and educational context which surrounds them (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). When we write more narrative stories about identity it is like weaving a spider web where we can understand more and find similarities and differences, compare, and contrast and narrate about life experiences learning a language abroad. Giving us the opportunity to grow as future educators, the inquiry narrative creates meaning and helps to understand the inner mental worlds and nature of the learner's language as an educational and social activity. It also allows people to be aware of relevant aspects of their lives that if they do not write, they would ignore completely as well as all aspects of their identities (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Convert, 1999) giving another perspective to those who face or will face similar situations.

The way in which the data was collected was through narrative research and in this case it corresponds to a multimodal narrative data collection because it is the one that connects with the research objectives and matches with the data collection that the researcher needs and wants to use. However, narrative inquiry should be taken with objectivity, organization, and good intertwining study.

3.1. Participant:

The main participant is the researcher, who is 30 years old, pre-service English teacher at the moment she is living in California, USA because she is interested in having an

advanced English level. But also, she seeks the reliability of the study to make it relevant for the construction of her Identity.

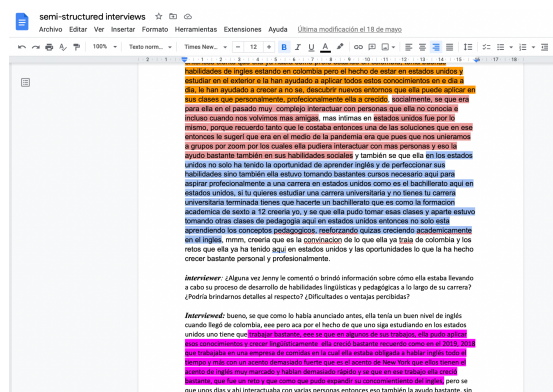
3.2 Data collection instruments

To collect the necessary data the researcher will consider an "autobiographical document" as an open written narrative, in which she describes episodes of the researcher's life story, as well as drawings and photographs to use as data analysis to remember and illustrate notable events in her life. But also, oral narrative through semi-structured interviews.

An autobiographical document is going to give a structure and organization to the learner process of the researcher. Writing an autobiographical document is going to give a retrospective of the process of forming an identity and give shreds of evidence of experiences in the past to recognize significant experiences and give answers to the objectives established by the researcher (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The researcher gather 16 autobiographical narratives, and she collected them in a word document (appendix E)

Semi-structured interviews give objectivity and help to collect more data to do the research. As Barkhuizen states interviews which have a flexible structure set structure and it allows the interviewer to explore unexpected avenues or probe for elaboration (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The researcher carried out 4 interviews. The first interview was for her cousin who has known her entire life, the second interview was for one of her classmates who courses different subjects together in Colombia but also they decided to live and study abroad, having similar experiences and becoming close friends. The third and forth interviews were teachers of the B.A program. These interviews were carried out for a 3th person to make them more objective and questions were created as guides for these semi-structured interviews. All of them are placed in a word document (Appendix G).

Screenshot of semi-structured interviews document where it shows the color and topic codification:



Multimodal data: Drawings and pictures to Barkhuizen et al., (2014) incorporate the visual elicitation which was mentioned earlier. In this case, to stimulate memories, feelings, and experiences of the researcher reflected them. Pictures were taken to help visually narrate the process of learning and the development of the researcher's identity. During the process, the researcher chose 26 pictures where she organized chronologically in a word document (Appendix F). to finally choose 6 pictures because it gives proof of pivotal moments in the researcher's life and form of her identity but at the end the researcher decided to use ... , and 4 drawings that show her mental state in different moments in her life, but at the end just using ... drawings placed in the same word document that the pictures (Appendix F). These pictures support living abroad experiences because they show as a visual proof and support the researcher's narrative about living abroad experiences and important moments that shape her personal and professional identity of a language pre-service teacher in a B.A. program.

Tabla 1

| <i>Data collection Instruments</i> | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Techniques | Instruments | Purpose & Participants |
| Multimodal data. | Photos and Pictures | The purpose of the photos is to complement and illustrate the narration that has been made within the biography. |
| Written Narrative | Autobiography | It aims to gather life stories to recognize significant experiences that form an English pre-service teacher's identity. The participant is the researcher. |

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Interview | Semi-structured interview formats | <p>It aims to gather data from other people's perspectives of the researcher's life and experiences providing reliability and objectivity to the investigation.</p> <p>The participants are a cousin of the researcher, two teachers of the B.A program, and one of the researcher's classmates of the degree in English at Santo Tomas University.</p> |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|---|

3.3 Trustworthiness.

This reliability is because a rigorous research process was followed, sources that are reliable because of research and academic instruction were selected for the theoretical framework, and the sources of information are primary and secondary sources. There are different sources of information that are real and both the research question and what is intended to be investigated here are based on the theory that has been explored previously in education, such as narrative in education and teaching and learning languages abroad for pre-service student teachers.

4. Data Analysis

As Barkhuizen said (2014) analyzing narrative data “involves the repeated reading of the data, coding, and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings” (p. 75). The researcher analyzed each one of the instruments and she used colors to code topics and similar information. With this thematic analysis, the researcher created a matrix in which she started classifying the information to determine the categories that could emerge from the collected data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; 2008; Creswell, 2014).

In the biographical document, the researcher used colors to divided them by topics:

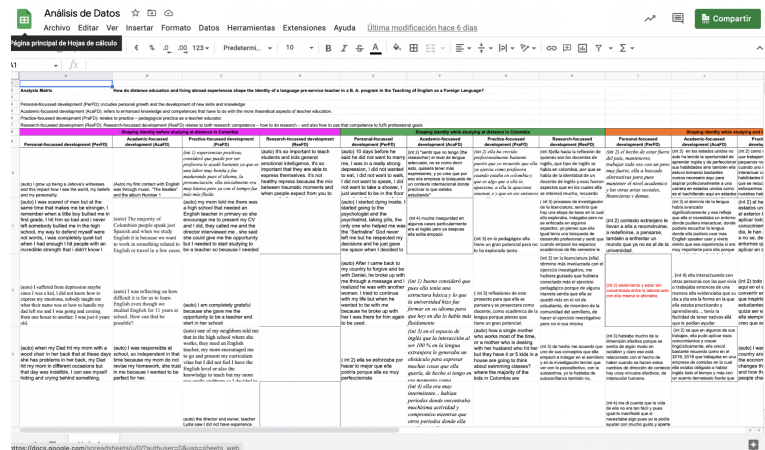
God: purple. Surviving in the United States: Green. English learning: yellow. Emotional factors: red. Violence: pink. economic stuff: orange. English and travel to the USA: blue. Art: cian. teacher stuff: dark orange

In the Semi-structured interview document, the researcher used colors to divided them by topics:

personal characteristics: purple, Teacher: Orange, social interactions: rojo, work environment: magenta, educational stuff: blue.

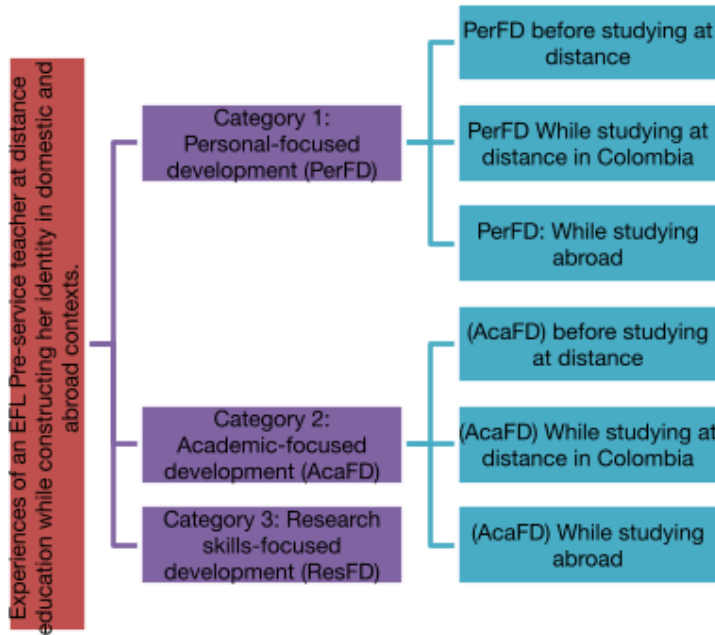
The investigation was categorized after analyzing and codifying after creating a matrix where categories and subcategories emerged, explained in the data analysis.

Matrix screenshot:



At the beginning of the present research, the investigator established three categories. These categories were corroborated along the study. These initial categories were named: Category 1: Personal-focused development , Category 2: Academic-focused development, Category 3: Research- skills focused development. and 3 subcategories divided by colors: Shaping identity before studying at distance in Colombia: magenta Shaping identity while studying at distance in Colombia: green. Shaping identity while studying and living abroad: Orange. However, and thanks to the rich data collection new information emerged and new categories arose.

Image 1: pre-established category.



From the pre-established category one: Personal-focused development, four sub-categories were found. I named them religion, Family support, violence, Resilience (Arte, Medical support). From the second category: Academic-focused development, two sub-categories emerged and I named them Autonomy (self- learning) and independence, English and travel to the USA, and Research- skills development. No third category emerged.

Image 2: The Categories

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| EXPERIENCES OF AN EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER AT DISTANCE EDUCATION | category 1: Personal-focused development. | Sub-category 1: Religion, sub category 2: Family support. sub-category 3: Violence. sub-category 4: Resilience (Arte, Medical support) |
| | category 2: Academic-focused development. | sub-category 1: Autonomy (self- learning) and independence. sub- category 2: English and travel to the USA. sub-category 3: Research -skills development. |

4.1 CATEGORY 1: Personal-focused development.

Personal-focused development refers to narratives that show a growth in the researcher's personality. Specifically, how those experiences build and manifest in her professional endeavors, how she expresses and relates to others in her daily life, but also how that personal growth affects her interactions in the classroom, with her students and coworkers, explaining what and how particular experiences affected and formed a personal and professional identity.

4.1.1 Sub-category 1: religion.

For Christians, God is the center of their lives. This will directly affect every decision and their perception of the world. Also, they strive to form within themselves Jesus' identity, and use Him as a role model. Moreover, religion and God are beliefs, and those beliefs directly affect the identity of a person; specially, when the individual starts going to church and learning specific behaviors and thought guides as happened with the researcher from an early age.

The researcher found that her personal life was always influenced by religion, as it is stated in the following excerpt: "I grew up being a Jehovah's Witness and this impacted how I see the world, my beliefs and my personality" (Autobiography # 16). From an early age, she was educated with biblical principles as, not lying, not stealing, helping others, being obedient, behaving in all situations, but depending on the interpretation of the words, she was forming her personal identity. When she mixed them with family and life experiences, all of these components together started forming an identity in her. For example, her mom taught her to be obedient through bible stories, so she started being obedient. However, mixed with the abandonment of her father, coupled with guilt and fear of further abandonment for misbehaving, led her to be an extremely well-behaved and overly quiet person, and unable to express her feelings. Through her adolescence this was thematic; she was constantly in contact with religion, whether it was the bible stories her mom read her to fall asleep, or praying first thing in the morning, religion was intertwined with every small aspect of her life.

This also affects her professional identity, because all those biblical principles, behaviors and thought guides are reflected in how she behaves at work, with her colleagues, with her students, and also in how she teaches her classes and the contents of them; for example: the researcher is a responsible person who will try her best with respect to her bosses, coworkers, and students because as Colossians 3:23 says: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (The Bible of New International Version, 2011, p.806). She does not use vulgar words, and she does not steal, or say double meaning jokes in her work because this was what she learned in the bible, so we can see how religion and God have formed a professional identity in her.

In the picture on the right, the researcher is with her family in a Jehovah’s Witness assembly. In the image, the women wear skirts, and the men wear ties. The way of dressing is different from other religious beliefs. The places where they meet are varied but, on this occasion, it was at the Facatativá (Colombia) Coliseum. It was a special meeting that takes place 3 times a year where many people meet at the same time. They are all very friendly and accept each other. The researcher is with her family, and it is observed that it is a religion that has transcended from her grandparents to her. This affected the way she dresses, in a demure and not fashionable way.



In addition, having a religious base helped her during difficult times. She eventually became engaged but it fell apart in a dramatic fashion, As it is stated in the following excerpt :“but God never left me but he respected my decisions and he just gave me space when I decided to get away from him.” (Autobiography # 6) All of this affected her university scores, but she was fighting to accomplish her dreams and give her best as it is stated in the following excerpt, “she was striving to do the best she could because she is a perfectionist” (interview 2). Really difficult experiences have a tendency to change the direction of one’s life. This was the case. The breakup was traumatic and she subconsciously decided to make equally dramatic life changes. She consciously decided not to return to Jehovah’s Witness,

and the big decision of moving abroad to the United States.

Fortunately, she eventually ended up in California and near a Christian church, and this move was important because God returned to her life and started healing her. As it is stated in the following excerpt “She has evolved in the social sphere, it is easier for her to interact with people,” (interview 2) and in the hands of the creator of heaven she continued healing as it is stated here, “spiritually, I know that her relationship with God was always important since her childhood but I would say that here in the United States and more in the last few months she has been able to grow in that spiritual area. She has come to recognize who God is in her life and she has changed considerably, not only her identity but her ideals in life, those spaces have also helped her to be more sure of herself, to trust her more and her decisions have been based on God and most of them have helped her continue growing.” (Interview 2)

At that moment the researcher found that her life had to change and began redefining herself by asking God for help and drawing closer to Him. One of her friends suggested she started speaking with a Christian group online as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I suggested to her back then that it was in the middle of the pandemic was that we join zoom groups through which she could interact with more people and that it also helped a lot with her social skills.” (Interview 2). And slowly and surely, the changes began to solidify, healing and new perspectives began to emerge. Even though the journey to God is long, she feels she is on the correct path to better things.

The religious connotation narrated before influenced her personal identity because she is a person who tries to follow biblical values her whole life. This influences her big and small decisions, using Jesus or God as a guide in her personal identity. Furthermore, this influences her professional identity. It is really important for her to not just teach English knowledge but also direct or indirect her biblical guidelines in her teacher exercises. Religion or God, despite the difficult circumstances, have helped the researcher to persevere, and has given her the hope that everything will be fine. Through these experiences the researcher can transmit the lesson of hope and perseverance to her students. When a student thinks that it is not enough, or he finds himself in a difficult situation and hope is lost, the

teacher could apply the lessons she learned from God about hope and resilience without preaching.

These experiences strengthened the researcher and made her more determined to get ahead as characteristics of her personal identity. She did not let herself be overcome by adversity, but it may be that another person may not have the ability to get ahead. Identity is forged by thousands of situations, but in one way or another, respect for God, led her to move forward and overcome her difficulties.

4.1.2 Sub-category 2: family support.

Family is the natural environment in which to grow up and receive support, even though it is not the case for everybody. The way people treat us as a child, especially our family or caregivers, it's going to change the way we see ourselves and the basis for our self-esteem, future decisions and the way we react to the world. This impact could be positive or negative and sometimes some of each.

Family support is totally important to get beyond adversity; it is our safe place. When that environment changes too much, it can affect our personal and professional identity as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I was going and coming from one house to another. I was just 6 years old" (Autobiography # 2) or as it is stated in the following excerpt "one day I could be in an amazing house with servants when "nonna" took care of me with a grand piano, with people who spoke Italian, and the other day I could be in a small house sleeping with 3 people in the same room." (Autobiography # 5) These experiences shaped the researcher's professional identity, creating uncertainty and no firm sense of true identity. But also, in the way that the researcher in her future teacher exercise is better equipped to understand students who have to live in a similar situation, to give words of encouragement and direction to their parents and to give strategies of how family and supportive environments can improve stability.

In addition, the researcher found out why for her it is difficult to find balance in her life affecting her personal identity. As she grew up experiencing radically different styles of life, "Sometimes my mom put all her attention on me when she was feeling well and sometimes, she could not take care of me even emotionally because she was dealing with

herself, and I could feel it.” (Autobiography #4). but the researcher’s grandmother was there, helping the researcher's mother to take care of her grand daughter (the researcher), the researcher's uncles were also very supportive, especially her uncle Hermes, as it is stated in the following excerpt, “then my uncle Hermes picked us up to bring us to my grandma's house when my dad left us, my uncle Hermes was like a father for me, he helped me sometimes with my homework, he taught me how to play some songs on the piano, he taught me God’s love with his acts and sacrifices, he bought me cookies and gave me toys and stuffed animals, he hugged me and took care of me, he disciplined me and watched formula 1 races with me, he created an imaginary house on my bed with a sheet and told me bedtime stories. He died when I was 12 years old.” (Autobiography #4). creating a strong personal identity in the researcher.

Indeed, family is the researcher's motivation to continue living and to work harder to have a better life for herself and for her family as it is stated in the following excerpt, “ I wanted to give my mom a better future, a beautiful house, a better economic status... My mom is my motivation to continue, to work harder, to create a better future” (Autobiography # 12) These experiences shaped a professional identity in the researcher. For her, it is pivotal to teach her students the value and importance of the family. Also, to explain that not all families are made up of a father and a mother, but also by grandparents, uncles, cousins and friends etc. and the respect for elders because they have a lot of wisdom.

For the researcher, family is extremely important, especially her Mother and grandmother. They have been supporting her, making her feel she can achieve big dreams as it is stated in the following excerpt “My mom always told me that I could do whatever I wanted in life. She always supported me to fulfill my dreams and she always tried to support me with whatever she could. She used to tell me: you can do it, you are strong, you have no limits, you can be anything you want to be, you are talented. She never clipped my wings”. (Autobiography # 12).

Moreover, even though the researcher mom had to work a lot, and she could not spend very much time with the researcher; the researcher’s mom gave her the tools and words to believe in herself, she always showed her with actions and words that she felt very proud of her, she also gave the researcher the space to prove to herself that she could do things for

herself. The researcher gained self-confidence especially in academic context. This can be seen in her subsequent decisions of taking big steps in her personal and professional growth but also to have a strong identity to stand alone in another country as she does in The United States. For the researcher it is vitally important that her students have the tools and emotional encouragement, but also their own space to do things by themselves shaping in this way her professional identity. These experiences strengthened the researcher and shaped her personal identity as well, her love for her mother, and the tenacious example of some members of the researcher's family led her to move forward and overcome her difficulties.

4.1.3 sub-category 3: violence.

Violent scenarios affect the personal and professional development of a pre-service teacher. Growing up in a violent home can be somatized in different ways, is the case of the pre-service teacher who experienced family violence, reproducing these dynamics in their personal and professional relationships, although with reflection and work on herself she could generate and/ or modify behavior patterns, but they will be reflected in many aspects since these experiences will be part of her identity.

The researcher found that she was not educated on her emotions as a child. As it is stated in the following excerpt “I did not know how to express my emotions, nobody taught me how to name them or how to manage them” (autobiography #2), instead she was exposed to different and difficult experiences when she was a child. Mostly, though having to live with a drunk and abusive father who beat her mother on various occasions. She recounts one episode in the following excerpt “my Dad hit my mom with a wooden chair in her back ... my Dad hit my mom on different occasions but that day was indelible, I can see myself hiding and crying behind something” (Autobiography #3). This brought her feelings of anger and taught her to respond with her hands rather than with words. As it is stated in the following excerpt “I feared men... I remember when a little boy bullied me in first grade, I hit him so bad and I never left somebody bullied me in the high school, my way to defend myself was not words, I was completely quiet but when I had enough, I hit people with incredible strength that I didn't know I had” (Autobiography #3). The researcher found out that this affected her professional identity because she discovered it was important for her to

teach emotional education but also have emotional control herself to become a better educator.

Moreover, the experiences mentioned above show the importance in her professional Identity; it is pivotal for the researcher to teach emotional intelligence. It is the case on multiple occasions when she had to help the kids she used to take care of as a nanny when they had fights or misunderstandings as it is stated in the following excerpt, “ I remember Sofia, my beautiful baby, one day she was playing with her brother, but Zado does not wanted to give her a toy she wants, I knelt down and talked to them in a nice way to take turns, they agreed but when was Sofias turn Zado does not want to give the toy to Sofia, I asked Zado nicely to give sofia the toy but he did not give the toy to her, he was angry and he run to another room, Sofia’s beautiful face was crying so bad, so I taught her to breath deep, slowly and count so this tiny princess started to breath and count 1,2,3,4... and at the end she smiled. I asked her, how do you feel? she said good! for my surprise in other occasions I saw my Sofi counting and breathing when she had a difficult situation” (autobiography #9) As a pre-service teacher these experiences make her give great importance to conflict resolution and the teaching of emotional intelligence, shaping her professional identity.

On the other hand, the researcher learned how to repress her feelings as a response to her specific context as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I did not know how to deal with my feelings more than to automatically repress them inside me as my dad had taught me. I started being introvertive in my thoughts with classical music” (Autobiography #4). The researcher’s father taught her to repress her feelings. She began to feel incapable of expressing her thoughts or needs in a correct or assertive way, so she preferred to isolate herself because she thinks that she does not know what to say in a conversation. She feels that she cannot flow in conversation as is stated in the following excerpt, “when my dad hit me and I was crying, he yelled at me ‘stop, do not cry, stop crying” and he restrained my arms. I learned at that moment to not express my emotions but to repress them, without understanding them and without knowing how to deal with them. “Don’t cry ” were his words. “I do not cry, because I do not have to cry, I have to repress and that's all.” (Autobiography #3). She recounts the day her father abandoned her; “I clung to him and did not let him go, he grabbed me hard by the arms and shouted, "stop, stop crying, you are going to stay in this house period” (Autobiography #4). This affects her professional identity

manifested in several ways. Communication is the most important aspect when having a job interview, and involuntary repressing thoughts during these moments can be counterproductive. On the job as well, it can be difficult communicating with coworkers especially during high stress situations. They may falsely believe she is not capable.

Likewise, the researcher had to see her mom crying too many times as it is stated in the following excerpt, "My mom cried every day and I asked her repeatedly where my dad was, but she never explained it to me. She just started crying more and or changed the subject. I slowly understood that even though I asked repeatedly, she could not answer me, so I started to be quieter and try to not be a problem for my mom." (Autobiography #4). The ability to understand others' feelings slowly developed through time; "I had really developed empathy since my dad left us and also, with bible stories my mom always taught me to value the small and the really important things in the world" (Autobiography #12). The researcher also saw her mom in many difficult moments in her life while simultaneously feeling she was guilty of the suffering of her mother. She decided to be the perfect daughter for her mom, and her reasons for this were as follows; "I did not want my mom to leave me too. I did not realize I was trying to be perfect." (Autobiography #4) Considering the former, the researcher now understands where perfectionism comes from. This became part of her personal and professional identity because she demands too much from herself and also expects too much from her students.

Besides, the researcher has had low self-esteem throughout her life and this pushed her to have her first boyfriend around the time the researcher began her English degree as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I saw Daniel felt attracted to me and I just gave him all my heart. I had low self-esteem and I saw him as a deep and amazing person because even though I was ugly, he was interested in me." (Autobiography #6). They got engaged in marriage but something unexpected happened as it is stated in the following excerpt, "10 days before the day of marriage he said he did not want to marry me. I was in a really strong depression. I did not want to eat. I did not want to walk. I did not want to speak. I did not want to take a shower. I just wanted to be on the floor and die. I did not want to finish my degree" (Autobiography #6) This frustrated some of the strategies that the researcher had implemented to finish her degree, delaying her process at the university, since this emotional impact was reflected in her feeling unable to continue with her studies and it was reflected in

her grades.

Nevertheless, these experiences narrated above shaped her personal identity, she learned to be strong, she learned the importance of love-steam, she learned to never put a man or a person before herself. But also, these experiences shaped a professional identity, teaching this important lesson to her students, integrating them in her future English classes.

Unfortunately, the researcher experienced a rape in the United States. This experience disconnected her from people and herself as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I was raped, nobody could help me, I felt alone and shame...I felt lost, sad, and angry...I could not pass my subjects in the university, I failed all my subjects. I started feeling scared about black people, I started to see it reflected how I felt about myself, I felt everybody could do whatever they want with me" (Autobiography #8). The researcher focused on her work and studies again trying to survive, but sometime able to express herself with some people as it is stated in the following excerpts, "She did express to me that this issue of isolation and being so concentrated between work and only with herself affected her...I think that this issue of socio-affective development is difficult to achieve in a foreign environment and she was very much in that of finding herself but not being able to interact with others" (interview 3). It is really important for people who travel as Au Pairs, immigrants, or as exchange students etc. to open channels of support and not feel alone or without support from any eventuality that could happen to them. Community is a necessity when a pre-service teacher lives alone in an abroad country.

4.1.4 sub-category 4: resilience (arte, medical support)

Amann (2015) explains that the word "resilience" originates from physics, describing the ability of a material to change shape and then regain its original form. Applying psychology to describe the ability of a person to recover from difficult situations, failures, affecting the way a person reacts to the world, being able to recover and start afresh. It is very evident in the researcher's identity, both personal and professional, using it as a response and method to face the different experiences in life through art and music.

Even though she has moments of extroversion, she has developed an introverted personality where she feels more comfortable being alone as it is stated in the following

excerpt, "I spent my days as a kid and teenager normally feeling and being alone because everybody was busy" (Autobiography #4) or as it is stated in another excerpt "when I see my drawings I can feel the confinement, the confinement in my own head, the overprotection and my ways of escaping to my imagination, in a house where there were only adults, and little fun, where my mother was traumatized and lived for life, she didn't even know what she was doing because my granny is also controlling" (autobiography #15). Although it was initially difficult to see, she became an artist during these difficult years.



In the drawing on the left, the researcher was expressing feelings of safety in a deep ocean with a whale and a jellyfish, her favorite animals at that time. Her long hair was expressing her desire to be a jellyfish and be part of that ecosystem. The feelings of isolation continued in her adulthood as it is stated in the following excerpt, "with my tendency to shut myself in because everything

was worse, I let off steam or expressed myself behind the art and this made me more introverted, but when I turned 22 I was a 16-year-old girl in my head because I didn't develop many emotional skills, or social skills for being in a bubble or in an imaginary box" (autobiography #15). The experiences narrated before formed an introverted characteristic in the researcher's identity, but it also influences her professional identity because she is able to feel identified and is able to empathize with those students who have similar personal characteristics, using art as an important tool of her teaching methods.

Moreover, the researcher's dream was to study Arts and not English so she enrolled in a course in Distrital University as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I saw I could take a pre-course in the Distrital University to apply in arts. I enrolled" (Autobiography #15). The researcher had to travel Monday thru Friday from Facatativa to Bogota, but her mother had surgery, and nobody was able to work in her store. The researcher was in a difficult situation as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I felt selfish to think in myself and my dreams, so I decided to not go to the university and stay and work in my mom's store. I could not leave my mom working on her surgery recovery alone." (Autobiography #12). When her mom was

completely recovered the researcher tried to come back to her art studies at the university, but it was too late, and she just gave up. The researcher acquired strength and motivation to look for other options, adapt to change, and develop resilience to the decisions made in different life situations, molding and creating important characteristics in her personal identity.

On the other hand, the researcher learned she is a strong woman. She continued with her dreams and studies as it is stated in the following excerpt, “the fact of being out of the country, supporting herself, working all it is a very heavy weight, she has looked for alternatives so as to maintain the academic level and other areas as social, financial etc,” (interview 2) or as it is stated in the following excerpt “she is a person who likes to study a lot and I think that this is fundamental for her” (interview 1) but her life in The United States was not easy, and that was reflected in her intermental state and some of her University teachers could see it as it is stated in the following excerpt “I realized that her life was not so easy and so I told her that if she needed anything, I would be happy to help her” (interview 4). The interview shows that she did not stay crying but decided to go traveling, forming these decisions and experiences in her personal identity.

Besides, she understands both extremes and feels she has become adaptable. She can sleep on the floor but also feels comfortable around abundance. Also these experiences molded her professional identity. These are adaptation characteristics that help her in situations where she has to teach in a school with a lot of English resources. Similarly, she adapted easily to a school environment where they did not have many English resources at all. In the picture on the right, the researcher is in one of the university classrooms with a classmate. She was crying all day before, but she had to make a final presentation. Even though she had to deal with a lot of things she did not give up an as one of her university teachers expressed in the following excerpt, “She is a very resilient person, that is, she has been presented with multiple situations of a personal and work nature, and despite all the difficulties, let's say she has always been open to requesting help and responding to the options that I have given her.” (Interview 4).



Likewise, the researcher did not feel she was seen in an integral way at the Santo Tomas University, but only as the being that studies and not the being that experiences other circumstances that will shape their academic learning process. Perhaps if the researcher had received support from the university or other institutions in which she could have been advised on how to overcome these moments without harming her academic life, then the researcher would have finished her degree sooner or could have kept studying outside her country. The researcher discovered the importance of mental health in her personal and professional development. "I would like the university had all that psychological help they have lately on the time I was rape, that would have helped a lot." (Interview 8). Even though the researcher has passed through many difficult times, it's not without its positives. Professionally, she does not shy away when a student has a significant crisis. This affords her the ability to talk to a student and speak from profound and genuine experiences. She can help students with resources she did not have as a student and more importantly she has empathy. She understands trauma. Personally, it is a little bit different. Although it is not ok, she practices forgiveness the man who raped her. This gives her the opportunity to take a step forward and live her life. It is still difficult but it does not consume her. More importantly, it allowed her to return to God.

Over time, the researcher began to talk about her rape to friends and family and this helped her start a healing process since keeping it was only leading her to have more hatred for herself and towards everything as it is stated in the following excerpt:

When you are raped, you can have mix of feelings, the feeling that you should not tell anyone, that you will be able to deal with it alone, that it was your fault. If you are alone in a foreign country you feel that you cannot tell your family back in Colombia because they cannot do anything, and that you are only going to worry them, that they don't need to know. That is a strong burden that grows, and you don't realize how healthy it is to talk about it with friends you trust, who feel your pain, who cry with you. It doesn't matter that the sex started as consensual. If then you didn't want it anymore but that person still took you by force, that's a violation. It doesn't matter if from the beginning the person took you by force, that's a violation. Whatever it was, however it happened, if you didn't want it and they forced you, it's a violation. You may feel guilty because perhaps at some

point during the rape you felt some pleasure. The body may be used to feeling pleasure, so perhaps you may feel complicit or confused. Because they took you by force, it is rape and nothing less. (Autobiography #8).

The researcher understood that she should not feel shame or guilt, and she decided not to be a victim but be a warrior. Now she will be able to encourage people who experience similar situations. The researcher is a brave woman, who dared to tell her story with her good and bad experiences, with the intention of being able to help other pre-service teachers who have gone through similar situations find inspiration. She wants to show others and let them know that they do not have to be afraid of how they will be seen. This of course applies to her professional identity as well. She could use her experiences and her courage to help her students and co-workers if and when they unfortunately experience something as horrible as rape.

The teacher found that coming to The United States was the best decision for her to develop her English skills but also her tenacity to achieve them made her develop resilience too. She did not give up and she continued improving them as one of her teachers explained in the following, “very receptive...initiative-taking...resilience in the face of overcoming a series of difficulties that, with other students who have presented similar circumstances, sometimes drop out or leave... She has persisted in stabilizing her process, she has not given up and I value that very much despite the fact that she has had to repeat”(interview 4). The researcher found out that even though it was a difficult journey in this country, she has grown significantly because she has been able to repeat and repeat and get out of her comfort zone because of the need to communicate in the English language.

4.2 CATEGORY 2: Academic-focused development.

Academic-focused development refers to narratives that show a growth in the researcher's academics. Specifically, how those experiences build and manifest in her professional endeavors, how her academic process and evolution have been formed through her life and how these experiences have been shaping her personal and professional Identity.

sub category 1: autonomy and independence.

Dr. Noorda (2013) describes *autonomy* as “the quality or state of being self-governing, which, in a complex and ever-changing environment, is never a steady state but rather a dynamic process.” In this context, autonomy is the learner's decision of being totally responsible for her learning and the implementation of strategies without an educational system. The researcher was not born with this quality but she developed it throughout her life.

One of his first steps towards autonomy was the circumstances she had to live with as a child. The researcher's mother worked a lot when she was in elementary and high school. Since the researcher was 10 years old, her mother did not have time to help with her homework, so the researcher had to learn how to be responsible and independent with her studies from an early age. She did well and she had good grades. This helped the researcher to believe in herself as it is stated in the following excerpt, “Even though my cousins had help and support from her mothers to do their homework, I noticed that I had better grades than them and I did my homework just by myself” (Autobiography #12). The researcher’s mother gave her the tools, and space at the same time to prove to herself that the researcher was smart and that she could do things on her own. This formed in herself autonomy, development, and self-confidence in academic matters, also shaping these characteristics in her personal and professional identity, as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I also tried that Sophia does the most things she can in her daily life by herself. I explain to her how to do things one time, I give her the space to do it by herself, when she can not do it I do not resolve the problem for her, I encourage her to continue trying until she can do it just by herself” (Autobiography #9). The previous excerpt shows how the researcher’s experiences shaped her professional identity when she had to teach something to a kid she took care of, teaching her autonomy and self-confidence.

Likewise, the researcher looked for self-learning strategies and resources to learn English when she was a teenager as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I start going to English Jehovah's witness meetings casually because I wanted to learn the language, but they were in Bogota, and I was living in Facatativá in that time.” (Autobiography #16). She used to go to these meetings made for people who live in Bogota but whose first language was

English. The researcher attended these meetings a few times because she used to live in Facatativá, a small town around 40 minutes by car far from Bogota where the meetings were held. The researcher found that although no one told her to go to these meetings, she decided to go to them, beginning to develop self-management learning skills, since her main objective was to learn English. Interestingly, her love of art coupled with self-management skills helped her to develop creative tools to help her students, positively affecting her professional identity.

Additionally, another self-learning strategy the researcher considered was to use books and magazines from Jehovah's Witnesses and try to learn vocabulary and pronunciation. At that time the Jehovah's witnesses also had their books on audio through CDs, so she tried to hear the CDs and read the books or magazines at the same time. She also used to do the same by buying books that talked about other topics as is stated in the following excerpt, "She tried to buy texts in English and Spanish to make a comparison, and another thing she used to do was a didactic form where she used memos or reminders in things around the house to make learning easier." (Interview 1). The researcher found that at that time of her life she became more determined to seek strategies for self-learning English, and this helped her to be able to adapt in the future to study at a distance at the Santo Tomas University and in her self-learning English in the United States, looking for strategies and tools to achieve her goals.

On the other hand, because the researcher grew up being a Jehovah's Witness this also influenced her way of looking at education as is stated in the following excerpt, "Jehovah's witnesses insinuate you to not study at the university and instead study something short and practical in life." (Autobiography #16). That is why the researcher decided to take a short course in a foundation in her town as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I decided to study an English course in an institute named Raul Zambrano Camadeer. I learned a lot because I needed somebody to push me and keep an eye on the results. I learned the basics of English there." (Autobiography #16). This situation allowed the researcher to understand how she used to learn the easiest. She saw that she needs to continue feedback and motivation from others, but due to the different experiences, she now does not have this learning style and now she learns more with self-learning. This also helps the researcher in her professional

development to see the importance of finding out her students' best way of learning, and teaching them the importance of autonomy.

Certainly, the researcher found out that she needed a good academic and hourly practice with somebody next to her to explain everything to her but also push her and encourage her to see results as is stated in the following excerpt, "I feel I learned a lot in the Raul Zambrano Camadeer because I feel it was more hours per week and the topics were relevant. I had continued feedback and encouragement all the time." (Autobiography #16). The researcher tried to study English online as well, but it was not successful because she was used to being accompanied by a teacher. This course required her to be responsible for herself. As it is stated in the following excerpt, "I started studying in open English but that does not work for me because I really did not have somebody to push me, and I do not have the self-force to do it by myself." (Autobiography #16). The researcher realized that not all teaching modalities are for everyone, and that the researcher fared better with face-to-face or distance learning than with virtual learning without a teacher in charge, even if it was almost personalized because the researcher felt more motivated and progressed when she had a teacher in charge of her learning with continuous feedback. The researcher found out that motivation is an important factor for autonomy and independence and she added it as a part of her professional identity.

In the picture on the right it is the certificate that shows she accomplished her English studies in the Raul Zambrano Camadeer.



The virtual course the researcher used was Open English. It is a flexible virtual course that gives vocabulary and open space to use with native people or classmates but the learning rate is given by the student and that is why the researcher felt it was not the course for her as it is stated in the following excerpt, "I did not learn in Open English because I have the need

for academic support. I need to establish an academic commitment that motivates me to go further. I need accompaniment; I need external motivation and for someone to be by my side to guide me in my learning processes and I was not going to do it with an informal education system like Open English.” (Autobiography #16). The researcher realized that in reality her self-management ability was not very developed so she needed the accompaniment. The researcher came to the conclusion that being able to have a learning process with a distance modality requires training, because the researcher needed to go through a process of accompaniment, adaptation, and establishment of strategies to achieve it.

The researcher decided to enroll in Santo Tomas University because it had an English degree program, but also she could take a course on Saturdays while she worked as a teacher Monday to Friday as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I found a university where I could study to be a teacher on the weekends because I had to work during the week in Santo Tomas University at distance and that was perfect for me, I continued working in that high school for almost one year.” (autobiography #12). The researcher decided to study at Universidad Santo Tomas because she considered it to be a university with high educational quality, which offered a curriculum that other universities did not offer and also its humanistic approach. But for her it was really difficult to pay the semesters, and she could not continue studying this career if she did not have the possibility to travel to the United States because of Colombia's economy.

Today she lives abroad where she does not have a teacher next to her. However, she has taken the skills she learned throughout her academic career and has learned to be more autonomous and independent. She does get feedback but now it is at a distance. She balances work and school, executes her goals, and knows to persevere.

The experience of having lived in the United States for four years changes the perspective of the researcher, making her see teaching from other perspectives as it is stated in the following excerpt, “the fact of being in the United States and studying abroad had helped her to apply all this knowledge on a daily basis, they have helped her to grow, to discover new environments that she can apply in her classes.” (Interview 2). The researcher found out that she had to learn and develop new pedagogical strategies, especially when she was working as a live-in babysitter because the culture and ways to teach are different in the

United States. This new knowledge and development of her language skills have made her open to new points of view and enriched her imagination of activities for her to apply in her classes in the future, but also the determination not give up on her studies even though the experiences became difficult but nevertheless inspiring her students as it is stated in the following, “everything that she has lived here abroad makes her become a teacher who inspires her students not to give up, maybe to be excellent as she always tries to be.” (Interview 2).

The researcher decided to start courses in United States to develop more her English skills like the high school, but also to enrich her career in child care as it is stated here, “She was taking courses here to aspire professionally to a career in the United States, such as high school...and she was taking other pedagogy classes, so she is not only learning the pedagogical concepts, but also reinforcing her growth academically in English.” (interview 2). The researcher found out that she started to evolve her English skills because she was using different tools to develop it as courses explained above and that was reflected also in her University scores and how her teacher saw her process, “her command of the language had advanced significantly and ...I feel that this experience was very important for her because I did detect that she had all the potential, all the information that she wanted to express, but what she knew at that time, the language did not allow it.” (Interview 3) the researcher felt her process through how she could express naturally thoughts she could not before this process.

The researcher found out that there is a tendency in her to want to try harder academically and push herself when she is around people who have more studies or a better quality of life for instance, “I have seen a tendency in California, especially in the East Bay area who work in tech such as Google, etc, that they are going to treat you differently if you have studies or money than if you do not have. I already have two ex-boyfriends who broke up with me because I am not stable in my career currently.” (Autobiography). The researcher found out that she developed a way to not fall down through difficult situations, but see them as a challenge and inspiration to be better, but also she found out that being in the United States has pushed her and given her inspiration daily as it is stated in the following excerpt “You can see kids reading books in the subway of New York.” (Autobiography).

4.2.2 Sub- category 2: *English and travel to USA:*

The researcher developed such a great love for English that this led her to go through many difficult circumstances in her life and not give up developing resilience. Because her great goal is to speak English as a native, this motivated her not to give up, and to travel to the United States.

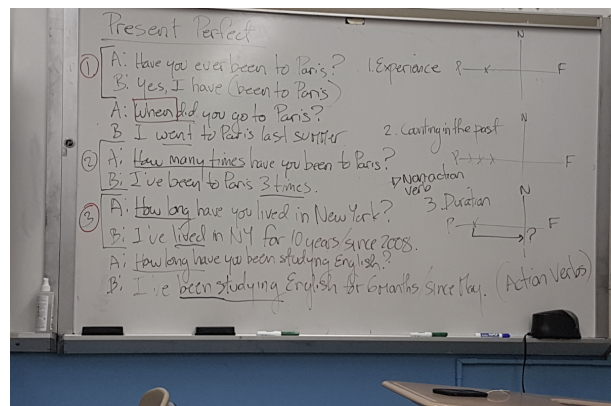
In this category, the researcher found that her first contact with English was through music as it is stated in the following excerpt, “my first contact with English was through music. The Beatles and the compilation album Number 1.” (Autobiography #16). This interaction was significant because through her family she learned to really enjoy music and turned music and art into a crucial factor of her identity. She also took English at school but her teachers and she were not as good as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I studied English when I was in primary school, but it did not go so well. In high school, we must memorize and make verb writing repetitions. I really did not learn too much at school and it was a difficult subject for me, though I used to have an acceptable score.” (Autobiography #16). The researcher understands the difficulties of not being very good at learning English, and she can understand students who have difficulties like her, thus feeling empathy for them, and shaping her professional identity. But also, these experiences help her to shape her personality identity; She wants to face first the things that are difficult, like English, and put extra effort until mastering it. It is also something she teaches her students: the importance of developing the difficult first, rather than the easiest things.

On the other hand, at the beginning of her first journey to The United States as an Au-pair she had to face different challenges in communication as is stated in the following excerpt, “I went to a bakery, and I bought food in English; it was a nightmare; they did not give me what I wanted but they gave me what they understood lol.” (Autobiography #1). She could go to another bakery or a store where people speak Spanish. She found out it is easy to speak Spanish because there are a lot of people in the United States who speak both languages as it is stated in the following, “I went to a place to buy a sim card, the woman saw that I had problems with my English so she started speaking in Spanish” (Autobiography #1). This is an immigrant country where people speak different languages and it’s normal as it is stated here, “in the United States there are a lot of people who speak two languages or more

and they are studying or working in another business,” (Autobiography #1) but she did not give up and she continued going to stores where they just spoke English because the researcher understood the importance of not falling into the comfort of speaking Spanish in the United States because if she did, she would not learn.

She started to learn English through interactions and the need to communicate her needs to others, leading her to develop self-learning strategies for example, “I had to start jotting down the new vocabulary I heard in my daily life asking the person how to spell it and the accurate pronunciation, but also write in Spanish sentences I wanted to express in English and then when I had the time research how to say them in English.” (Autobiography #16). Sometimes the researcher was shy to speak in English or ask for help but she figured out learning was more important, and this aspect marked a characteristic of her personality and identity, making her more self-confident and more aware of her learning and her development of her self-study skills. Because she had to force herself to speak with others, she realized she was not as shy as she thought, and she remembered how God sees her, and also what her mother told her when she was a kid, “you can be whatever you want to” she decided that, “shy person” is just a label and she can shape her personal and professional identity too.

On the other hand, since the researcher was in Colombia, she examined libraries and institutions where she could study English free in the United States, as it is stated in the following excerpt “my goals in this country were studying English in the library because it is free and with English speakers, become fluent.” (Autobiography). So when she was in New York, the first thing she did was enroll in a high school in Astoria, NY English as the picture on the left shows. It is a classroom with a board where a teacher wrote the explanation of the present perfect. She did not feel these classes helped her very much because she already knew those topics, but what she saw she needed were somebody to correct her mistakes when she was speaking and her pronunciation.



The experience of living with native people helped her English development skills to a certain point as is stated in the following excerpt, “she lived with families that were native, that way they exchanged the language on a daily basis.” (Interview 1). The researcher learned more English vocabulary related to babysitting. However, she felt that she stagnated to a certain point since the vocabulary she used with the children was basic, so she understood that she had to change the context to learn new things. That is why the researcher also found jobs in restaurants, as it is stated in the following, “she worked in a food company in which she was forced to speak English all the time...it was a challenge and how she was able to expand her knowledge of English.” (Interview 2). The researcher saw that the best way to learn English is by getting out of her comfort zone and when she feels comfortable in one context and feels that she already knows most of the vocabulary, she must move to another context to advance and grow in her English skills.

The researcher found out that even though the focus of comparison has to be with the person she was yesterday, it is enriching to analyze the development of the English skills of people around her, even more, if they are in similar situations, and especially if they are better than her. To ponder about what has served them or what she is doing differently than the others are doing provides feedback as it is stated in the following excerpt, “but when I see that people who learn faster English than me was because they talked to native people most of the time, who was not shy to make mistakes and being corrected, reading and writing in English and studying it so hard every day I started doing the same.” (Autobiography). The way the researcher sees herself affects the way she interacts with others, but also living in an English-speaking country the way she interacts with others affects the development of her English skills as it is stated in the following, “I barely wanted to interact with people and I did not want to make mistakes, I do not want people to think bad about me, this girl has charisma and speak with confidence to others, this makes her speak more and more the language and be corrected.” (Autobiography).

Besides, it was illuminating to discover that her English skills were not good enough. When the researcher had the opportunity to practice her English skills in a native English-speaking country, she faced a lack of preparation, as it is stated in the following excerpt: “I thought I knew English in Colombia but when I came here [to The US] I could see that I was not really prepared.” (Autobiography #1). The researcher realized the importance

of traveling abroad, and how it improved English skills, but she faced the reality that somehow, the way she learned English in Colombia and the vocabulary was different from the English she was exposed to daily. She felt this was the next level in her English education. These discoveries and experiences shaped her professional identity, Because now the researcher knows the linguistic jargons in the United States, with real English, which is spoken on the street. Thus, when her students travel to the United States, the researcher is and will be able to teach them all the knowledge she learned living in the United States in that way, her students not only learn the academic part of English but also that they can feel comfortable expressing themselves in real contexts.

Despite that, she decided to travel back to Colombia to reunite with her former boyfriend Daniel. Unfortunately, it did not work out. The researcher came back to Colombia as it is stated in the following excerpt, “After I came back to my country to forgive and be with Daniel, he broke up with me again through a message and I realized he was with another woman” (Autobiography). The researcher decided to travel to The United States a second time to leave all her sadness and attempt to survive again. The researcher fell into a depression again and withdrew deeper into herself and this affected how she interacted with and how she trusted others as it is stated in the following excerpt, “socially, I know that in the past it was very complex for her to interact with people she did not know.” (Interview 2) Her depression had negative effects on her cognitive skill as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I make my mind block from stress and sadness” (Autobiography). Consequently, when the researcher came back to The United States again, she was feeling in survival mode as she felt on different occasions through her life as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I was hungry and just with the internet in the airport, I took screenshots of the route. I felt in survival mode, but it was not something new for me because I have had that feeling before too many times but in different situations” (Autobiography #2). She found out that curiosity, the feeling of adventure, and being outside of her comfort zone are characteristics in her personal identity. It is very important for her to know how to manage her personal emotions and many times it is left aside. important lessons that influenced her personal and professional identity such as not trusting everyone, not putting other people than herself, and managing her emotions.

Her relationship with English has been unique. It started with the Beatles and ended in the United States after some life-changing events. English first became a fascination, then

over time it became a tool for survival and resilience, and finally English became a tool to thrive, and gave her hope that everything will be better than she expected.

sub-category 3: Research -skills development.

This subcategory shows the initiation of her research skills development until the moment to become a researcher. It shows her first steps coursing subjects about investigation even though she did not want to be a teacher at that moment and then being part of the Institutional Research Mentorship, discovering important aspects about herself, then taking a positioning as a pre-service teacher and finally developing a research about Identity. She discovered how through her experiences she can help her students and other pre-service teachers.

Even though this category was pre-established at the beginning of the study, the researcher found interesting information in the collected data becoming a sub-category. At the beginning of her career, she did not want to be a teacher. Less, she was not focusing on the potential she could have as a researcher, as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I would feel that there is a basic stage in which she explored, investigated but did not focus on some aspects,” (interview 3) but when she participated in the institutional research mentorship program and pursuing more investigative subjects, she felt passionate about the topics; she started to enjoy it and develop her research skills as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I think that she still had a search for professional development and I felt that when the 6th semester academic spaces aroused a lot of concern about the investigative part of the program and that was how she approached the research institutional research mentorship program” (interview 3).

The researcher eventually did take a position as a teacher and she found it interesting, helpful, and meaningful to investigate profound concepts and meanings of education, finding it really indispensable for her teaching activity. The university helped her arouse her curiosity and develop research skills as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I think that in the institutional research mentorship program she began to reflect a more critical, more participatory posture, she was more aware of the training processes, of the pedagogical aspects of the language, always showed an interest in establishing a relationship between the

language, culture, and society. (Interview 3). She found out that she feels enthusiastic about human behavior, how and why people act like they do, like sociolinguistics studies that focus on pedagogy, in order to be able to reach all the students and teach them meaningfully.

The researcher could see how her emotions, self-esteem, and self-confidence affected the way she learns English. That is why she sees these concepts as important factors to take into account when making reflections and reflecting on the teaching activity with her students as it is stated here, “In fact, I remember that one of her concepts that she began to investigate in the research mentorship program and in the research had to do with the psycho-affective, with self-esteem. I also spoke to her about self-confidence.” (Interview 3). The researcher found a crucial factor to incorporate into her lesson plans: to research students' inner mental states and understand their context, to be able to teach and enrich them, and not simply the acquisition of a language.

The researcher found out the importance of researching her student's contexts, but also her own as an educator, as her investigation teacher explains in the following excerpt, “She reflected on who the English teachers are, what type of English is spoken in Colombia, why the identity of an English teacher is discussed, and those were aspects in which she was very interested.” (Interview 3). She concluded that in Colombia people become English teachers for different situations, but also she researches and meditates about her own intentions and motivations. She found out that in Colombia there exists a myth about the best English variation, some people think that there exists just two kinds of English and they tend to believe British English is better than American English because they assume English comes from England, but the type of English Colombian people learn is from The United States because its geographical position.

At the Santo Tomas University, there are subjects that are focused on the teacher's identity such as language and cyber culture, language and cultural awareness, anthropology, culture, sociolinguistics etc. The researcher found out that all the components she was interested in are bound to the identity. That is why she decided self-analyze her identity as a pre-service teacher as it is stated here, “I remember that in the hotbed she came with reading notes because that was also part of the reflection of the institutional research mentorship program so you can also see how that permeated her and led her to those points of reflection

and for that reason, I would believe that she is very inclined towards the development of narrative research.” (Interview 3). After reading authors like Barkhuizen in class, the researcher decided with her teacher’s help to develop the journey of self-knowledge and meditate on her own identity as a teacher. As a pre-service teacher, focusing on affective positioning as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I was struck by the fact that when we started working on the narrative project and she talked about this character of identity and also about the foundation teacher, the methodology teacher Martha Bonilla, I sense that your attention unfolds in the affective direction.” (Interview 3). This has been the path of the researcher to become a researcher, thus learning to create knowledge by researching on a specific topic, and with the research tools to be able to solve issues in the educational chore.

5. Findings:

The researcher found out that growing up in a religious context will influence how a person views the world even if they change their beliefs consciously or unconsciously. It will be bound to the ones that were planted in their childhood. The researcher of this investigation has been built as a person who knows how to get ahead after adversity, seeing her center and pillar of strength as God and her family, but also the self-construction has been one of the important factors identified in the research; different experiences and the decisions taken to solve them will add to develop a personal identity. This confirmed the idea of Norton when he says that an Identity is formed of our thoughts and our beliefs making this process subjective and particular for each person (Norton, 2013; as cited in Barkhuizen, 2017).

Likewise, the investigation shows that learning style can change through time and experiences, such as the researcher who used to need a physically present teacher, then she started to study a degree at distance and finally living in the United States, she was pushed to create tools of self-learning and be completely responsible for her knowledge. As Curtis et al., (2015) explain the differences of physical teachers who delivered the information in the students’ hands but self-directed learning the students create their own sources.

The researcher found out that she wanted to come back to The United States. But, she did not plan her trip well as is stated in the following excerpt, “My aunt's friend had an empty

room, so I had to sleep on the floor. I was hungry,” (Autobiography #2) but the researcher and others could find out another characteristic that shapes her identity as it is stated in the following excerpt “she is a persistent person” (interview 1). Even though she had studied English before, the researcher did not feel confident with her English skills as it is stated in the following, “I did not feel comfortable speaking in English even though this was my second time coming to New York” (Autobiography #2). The researcher found out that how she feels emotionally affects how she expresses herself to others as it is stated in the following excerpt, “ I couldn't understand everything the flight attendant said. One thing that I discovered is that when my mind is scared my brain does not understand anything even though I know the words, I can't even give my name when they ask it” (Autobiography #2). These experiences teach the researcher the importance of reminding her students that they are indeed capable of doing anything they want, becoming a characteristic of her professional identity.

What she found really helped her in English were missionaries and foreigners of the church as it is stated in the following excerpt, “there were missionaries from the United States or other countries who spoke English and I started to have real English contact with them when I was around 11 or 12 years old, maybe some sentences or short conversations in English.” (Autobiography #16) The researcher found that because she was a shy person, she lost opportunities in life that she could have taken better advantage of even though she learned the basics with them.

The researcher found out that she started studying for a degree in English because of a job opportunity. One of her neighbors told her that in the school she needed an English teacher. Even though the researcher did not believe she had the English skills of a teacher, her mom encouraged her to present her resume for an English teaching position as it is stated in the following excerpt, “my mom encouraged me to go and present my curriculum vitae but I did not feel I had the English level or the knowledge to teach.” (Autobiography #16). The principal and owner of this school gave the researcher the opportunity to work as a teacher if the researcher enrolled in an university to study a degree in English as it is stated in the following excerpt, “principal Lydia called me again and she said she was going to give me the opportunity if I started to study a degree in English” (Autobiography #16). This work was significant for the researcher because it opened the door to a new world of learning to be a

teacher, an external motivation that led her to achieve new and exciting things. But also, she understood the importance of not giving up as an attribute the researcher values in her students more than their English level, becoming a characteristic in her professional identity.

The researcher found that she had to learn how to be more independent and responsible in her own learning process while studying at distance at the Santo Tomas University as it is stated in the following excerpt, “When I started studying at Santo Tomas University I felt uncomfortable because even though it is formal education, there is continuous support by teachers at a certain level of self-learning” (Autobiography #16). The researcher had the time to learn and enjoy being part of her own learning process even though at the beginning of her career she focused her attention on English studies or subjects that talk about culture and society, leaving aside the subjects of pedagogy as it is stated in the following excerpt “When it was about pedagogy history or pedagogical methodologies, etc. I just studied to pass the subject, but I was not aware of the importance of them because I did not want to be a real teacher.” (Autobiography #14).

The researcher found that Colombia's economy affects education since both students and teachers can experience frustration by having to choose between work to pay their education or enroll in a university but not being able to pay the semester. The identity of people changes as Barkhuizen (2021) states who made a study in Colombia, says that the socio-cultural and economic aspects will affect the identity of teachers and pre-service teachers.

With time the researcher started to reflect on her teaching activity, and she found out the way she used to teach her students was the way she learned, but not all her students learn in the same way, in that moment the researcher started to be interested in pedagogical subjects as it is stated in the following excerpt, “I started being aware of the necessity and importance of learning about different kinds of methodologies to teach English and integrate it with all the subjects the university had in their curriculum.” (Autobiography #14). The researcher started seeing herself as a teacher and this was not noticed by the full-time teachers, as one of them explains in the following excerpt “she perhaps initially unconsciously but progressively with greater self-learning and greater reflection on what she learned at the university and what she wanted to do was transform her identity as an English

teacher.” (Interview 3). The researcher started to see herself, position herself, and delve into her identity as an English teacher.

Different personal situations interrupted the studies of the researcher with her subjects as it is stated in the following excerpt “she was very intermittent... There were periods where I found a lot of activity and commitment from her while other periods where she was very scattered or she was simply at a loss... she came late or she had a series of difficulties.”(interview 4). When the researcher felt well emotionally she used to be really focused on her studies as one of her teachers explained in the following excerpt, “in the academic activity she was really noticeable that she was outstanding,” (interview 4) or one of her classmates explained in the following excerpt “a diligent student, when I just met her she was coursing 8 subjects and she passed the majority of those subjects, obviously the academic load was very complex, very difficult.” (Interview 2) but when she was not well emotionally, she was totally disconnected and unable to pass her subjects.

All of these experiences shaped her personal identity as an emotionally unstable person at that time but also after work as a teacher, she could identify similar behavior attitudes in her students and aid her to help her students, becoming a characteristic in her professional identity. She started to see and develop characteristics in her personality which she was not aware of, and others could see her as it is stated in the following, “she liked to learn, she was a student who always participated, also who questioned, who liked to investigate. Participatory and extremely critical.” (Interview 3) or as it is stated in the following excerpt “very responsive...initiative-taking...resilient.” (Interview 4)

The researcher found out that her English level was not evolving and she started having difficulties with the language as it is stated in the following excerpt, “in the English space that the interaction being 100% in the foreign language, created an obstacle for her to express many things that she wanted, in fact, if I have memories at that time in the tutorial on Saturday, she was trying to express many things but she herself was blocked.”(interview 3). The researcher also saw it and even though she passed the English subject, she felt stuck in her English skills with a lot of insecurities as stated here, “feeling that I (the researcher) do not have the appropriate level of language, I do not know how to say this, I would like to have more expressions, and I think that is why she begins the search for an international

context where she can practice what she was studying.” (Interview 3). At that moment she understood she needed to be in a foreign country where she could immerse herself in the English language.

The best way the researcher found to be able to go to another country was through the Au Pair program, as is stated in the following excerpt, “I decided to be part of an exchange program named Au Pair. I found a family and I traveled to the United States because I did not want to be in Colombia anymore and it was a great opportunity to develop my English skills.”(Autobiography #7). The researcher found out the importance of knowledge in different contexts; in Colombia, the researcher developed more pedagogical skills, but in the United States she developed more English skills. The researcher saw when she traveled to The United States that linguistic learning could be more developed than pedagogical skills, but the idea is to find a balance even though the context did not allow it.

The researcher discovered that meanwhile she started being a teacher, studying at the university, and the experience of living in another country having the opportunity to work with children of different ages, and being able to teach them after working as a babysitter has made her practice and grow as a teacher as stated in the following excerpt, "she has grown professionally a lot since I remember that she was already a teacher when she was in Colombia and that it is something that she is passionate about, she is passionate about teaching, and that in back then she was teaching English when she was in Colombia.” (Interview 2) although the researcher has developed more in English skills than pedagogy as stated in the following excerpt, “pedagogically she has enormous potential but has not explored it as much.” (Interview 3).

The previous events allowed the researcher to become mindful of the difference between the knowledge received in classrooms and the one through immersion in a foreign language. As it is stated in the following excerpt, “She told me that one thing was tutoring or the exercise of learning a language in classrooms when we had physical spaces back then rather than virtual ones.” (Interview 3) and another thing was when you put it into practice in a real context. This awareness led her to create innovative environments and syllabus for her students, where she could apply everyday English in her classes.

The researcher found that As Barkhuizen (2017) states, the interaction that both students and pre-service teachers who have the experience of being abroad can modify their identity, creating some developmental traits, either at the level of trust or level of frustration depending on how it is related to the context. In this study it is confirmed that the way a pre-service teacher interacts with the host country will define how this person will unfold in the context and the learning skills the student is developing will be directly affected. For example, if the researcher expresses confidence when interacting with other people, she will be able to take more advantage of the learning opportunities of the Language than if she is a shy person who refrains from speaking or asking questions.

The researcher also discovered that it is not just being exposed to English because there are people in the United States who have lived for 20 years or more and do not speak it or Americans whose parents speak other languages, but they only speak English. For example, “People who grow up in New York with Spanish speakers parents speaking both languages properly but other ones with the same reality who don't speak Spanish,” (Autobiography #2) but it is tenacity and discipline; it is wanting to really learn even if you are in Colombia or in a country where English is spoken, “it is about if you want to have meaningful learning because life is going to give you all the tools to learn even though you live in Colombia through the internet, etc.” (Autobiography #2).

The experience of living with native people helped her English development skills to a certain point as is stated in the following excerpt, “she lived with families that were native, that way they exchanged the language on a daily basis.” (Interview 1). The researcher learned more English vocabulary related to babysitting. However, she felt that she stagnated to a certain point since the vocabulary she used with the children was basic, so she understood that she had to change the context to learn new things. That is why the researcher also found jobs in restaurants, as it is stated in the following, “she worked in a food company in which she was forced to speak English all the time...it was a challenge and how she was able to expand her knowledge of English.” (Interview 2). The researcher saw that the best way to learn English is by getting out of her comfort zone and when she feels comfortable in one context and feels that she already knows most of the vocabulary, she must move to another context to advance and grow in her English skills.

The researcher decided to start courses in United States to develop more her English skills like the high school, but also to enrich her career in child care as it is stated here, “She was taking courses here to aspire professionally to a career in the United States, such as high school...and she was taking other pedagogy classes, so she is not only learning the pedagogical concepts, but also reinforcing her growth academically in English.” (interview 2). The researcher found out that she started to evolve her English skills because she was using different tools to develop it as courses explained above and that was reflected also in her University scores and how her teacher saw her process, “her command of the language had advanced significantly and ...I feel that this experience was very important for her because I did detect that she had all the potential, all the information that she wanted to express, but what she knew at that time, the language did not allow it.” (Interview 3) the researcher felt her process through how she could express naturally thoughts she could not before this process.

The researcher also found that it is important to be emotionally stable because this can affect the way you learn or your performance in the University, “when I was working in (the man who rape me) house I could not pass my subjects in the university. I failed all my subjects.” (Autobiography #8). Her teachers also saw it as it is stated in the following excerpt, “motivation or due to personal circumstances but then they did the opposite, if there were periods where she totally disappeared or simply her process was not, let's say, the best in terms of results.” (Interview 4). That is why the support that can be offered is important, always relying on other people as a support network, because universities can become unaware of the vicissitudes that students go through every day.

This study also shows the importance of emotional education in a human being at an early age because the management of emotions will affect every area in life, as the investigation demonstrates especially in learning processes. The researcher had no emotional education as a child, so emotional education became a feature in her pedagogical practice and part of her pre-service teacher identity. As Barkhuizen (2017) states, the identity of a pre-service teacher is unique because of their life experiences.

The researcher found out that if she wants to success in her studies, she had to find a place to feel secure that is why she decided to move to another state where she had family

and also save money to be able to sustaining herself financially, as it is stated here, “When I had enough money, I decided to quit my job and went to my Aunt's house to take 8 subjects at the same time but in the last month my cousin made my life unbearable so I decided to leave the house.” (autobiography #9). It is really difficult to work and study at the same time, mostly because the learning is not meaningful all the time; the researcher learned a lot in that small time, and she had to pass those 8 subjects successfully because she could concentrate only on her studies but also because emotionally, she could improve drastically.

The research showed that when a pre-service teacher traveled abroad, the new context can change her aspirations. She adapts to the lifestyle of the people around her in the new country. She is exposed to new possibilities and with the hope that she can achieve it because a new socio-economic reality becomes possible for her. but also In this research it was shown that even if you are living in an English-speaking country, learning the language is not guaranteed just because you are exposed to it, what guarantees the acquisition of the language is the constant effort to study it and practice it in different ways even if you are in a country where English is not spoken as the main language.

The researcher wants to continue training professionally and one of the tools to do it is through Research, this is fundamental to growing up as a teacher or pre-service teachers being an example of one of the most important things to investigate as a teacher or pre-service teacher and it is Identity, because as Barkhuizen (2017) explains that the way a pre-service teacher perceives themselves, influences the classroom. Santo Tomas University has different subjects and institutional research mentorship programs to develop it.

6 Conclusions

A religious identity was formed whose goal is to have Jesus' identity. She began in a religious context. After all, she started as a Jehovah's Witness, separated herself after some very difficult situations, then slowly brought herself back to being a Christian. Now however, her religious identity matured as she matured, although it is a continuous process. She also formed an identity of resilience. She did not allow herself to be overcome by adversity. She became adaptable, and she did not break under extreme circumstances. This identity of resilience was formed slowly and over time and many times it did almost defeat her, but she found the strength and over time she became better at overcoming problems. Now she is a person who can listen without judgment, create a safe space, and help others overcome problems big or small.

Although she sometimes finds it difficult to balance life, being many times either black or white, and being a sensitive person who takes things personally, she knows how to achieve her goals. She is stronger than before and does not let herself be defeated by problems anymore. She is a person with a disciplined identity, who knows how to organize herself to get where she needs to get and achieve her goals. She also developed an identity as a strong worker. She has a tremendous work ethic. She is a perfectionist and she will give one hundred percent of herself. She believes this is important. However, she also has an identity of kindness and understanding so she tries not to be too hard on herself or others if things do not work.

She developed a generous identity. She had special and unique perspectives of the world. As stated earlier, she has seen poverty and abundance. She understands you can have material wealth and it can be taken away, so why hang on to it? She also has an identity of encouraging others. She had many great people in her life pushing her forward in both the personal and academic spheres. She pays this forward in two ways: she encourages people by being a great listener and she encourages people by being a great role-model. It took great effort, but she developed an identity of good self-esteem academically. Her trials and tribulations showed her that she isn't just intelligent, but that she has the right tools to develop herself and accomplish wonderful things.

Along these lines, she has an aggressive identity, but it is disciplined. She developed both physical and emotional control. She could react, but more importantly she has the discipline to remain in control. Moreover, she has an artist identity. Her introspective research found she only discovered this amazing side through childhood adversity. In the beginning it was a coping mechanism, but now it is a strong desire. It is demonstrated that some adversity brings the best in a person.

She is a work in progress. As stated in her research she has both the identity of an introvert and an extrovert. She can be a person who finds it difficult to express herself when she doesn't feel comfortable or she can find it difficult to be confident. She can be a person who does not flow in conversation with all people. Her research showed how and why she developed an introverted personality. Her reaction to defend herself with certain situations, but as she continues her life journey she becomes more confident and with God healing she is recognizing and forming her true personal identity since traveling to the United States and becoming attached to God have led her to be totally free to find herself. She also tends to have low self-esteem but she also has a critical identity and this makes her understand that she can shape and guide her own identity. It is a subjective understanding so she can mold it as she wants. but she also has an empathic identity, and this helps her deal with own negative thoughts. It also helps her relate and understand those around her.

There are some issues she still has to work through. She doesn't trust others easily. This comes from a place of self preservation being this part of her personal identity. The researcher also found out that she is an impulsive person but is learning to recognize these different characteristics in her. The researcher also discovered that when she feels emotionally, it affects her ability to express herself in English because she feels nervous and blocks herself even if she has the knowledge. It is frustrating when she knows she is capable but isn't able to express herself. This is why she escaped the world with art and music. It is very important to note that initially art and music were ways of dealing with the world. Today it is an active choice.

The researcher has self-control and this helps her become a better educator. She learned how to control her feelings in that way she helps her students to manage their own

internal struggles. She is a pre-service teacher who gives importance to religious and family values. She seeks great work from her students by requiring them to do things well or not at all, and at the same time having empathy and encouraging them. She desires to give her students and the children she cares for wings to fly. She is a pre-service teacher who likes to give her students the tools but who gives them the space so that they can prove to themselves. She noticed when a student has space they internally develop the necessary tools. They reason through the issue.

She is a pre-service teacher who seeks to generate independence and autonomy from her students. She learned this throughout her career and knows its value. She is a teacher who gives too much importance to conflict resolution and the development of emotional intelligence in her students. She is a pre-service teacher who has been through many things and thus is able to give advice to both students and parents on the importance of having and growing up in a healthy environment for a child, a pre-service teacher who teaches through art and imagination. a pre-service teacher who needs to work more on her confidence when speaking or teaching when she feels nervous.

She is a pre-service teacher who in her educational chore reiterates to her students the importance of being critical and of seeing that her identity, her decisions, and her future are in her hands and thoughts. She is a pre-service teacher who finds job interviews difficult, so many times her qualities go unnoticed. She has a lot to contribute but it is unfortunately missed by some. She is a teacher who tends not to feel comfortable with teenage students, for fear of criticism and rejection, but she is working through it. She is a pre-service teacher whose teaching is resilience, and she is a teacher who knows what it is like to be in crisis and can help students with depression, mental health, who have been raped.

Not all learning techniques are for everyone, there is the importance of finding the way our students learn. The researcher found out that motivation is an important factor for autonomy and learning. Education is seen and developed in a different way in Colombia and the United States. The experience of living abroad gave her a high level of value when teaching in Colombia, such as being able to teach her students not only academic English but also common English with expressions and slangs that are used in a real context in the United

States, as well as other ways of seeing education and other pedagogical strategies collected through being a nanny etc. The teacher returned the research exercise as part of her identity.

The researcher found the importance of community, especially when you are alone in another country, for which it would be good for the university to continue working to be more aware of students who are studying abroad. There are learning styles that make it easier for a student to learn. Autonomy in one's own education is something that develops, not that one is born with it.

The researcher found that she cannot give up on English, and that she should not compare herself with the learning of others because that will make it more difficult. Learning English is personal and that she should only compare herself with herself, that learning English often feels like swimming against the current but you have to keep going, looking for different learning strategies.

Struggle experiences foster good EFL teachers and good human beings because they give them a broader understanding of life, of experiences that their students or future students may have; it makes them humble; it makes them develop qualities such as empathy, resilience, and courage. The courage and all of them that have been discussed throughout this investigation that enrich the teaching practice in an extraordinary way, that an EFL teacher who has not had to go through experiences of struggle might not be able to see from the same point of view.

The contributions to the program of this research are to give significance to distance education. With this research we were able to show how important it is to have distance education in Colombia because for a person who had the experience of going abroad and who, due to different circumstances, had to also learn or work, a face-to-face program would have been impossible. However, the researcher was able to complete her studies thanks to the distance modality offered by the Santo Tomás University.

The contributions to the university classmates or the people who read this research is to expose the example of the researcher about some difficult experiences that a person could potentially face while abroad, and that these experiences can happen to anyone, but that it is

also possible to thrive. Develop emotional intelligence and the way we face problems will give us different results. This will be part of our identity, further contributing to the pre-service teacher's identity investigations.

The contribution towards research with this research is to show the importance of motivating more inquiry research studies within the degree because the images make it easier for one to develop the narrative, it places the reader within the context and can bring back memories. and reflections that sometimes are not perceived within the written narrative.

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8. Appendix

A: "biographical document" collecting open written narrative, in which it describes an episode of the researcher's life story.

Appendix B:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1p_hblKniGSxS5IOdoIpD3dcKXIpGkDbrZ4uNgyt-7Q8/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix C: In this piloting data collection it was just the researcher.

appendix D:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bjyTGF43GynYy2TW46FnyvNxrpd1aV1TgbQdjRj9Rs/edit#gid=0>

appendix E:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EQ2G64ZjIX9r1-av7H2ESpAOz4eKq1YCNv9iL307Hww/edit>

appendix F:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10gWZeIVrINWL4CzooND6II6t1FOBk13OhHytTX-99Go/edit>

appendix G:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QrwB6taWY1kvACktWsinAjOjcMXhDqZok6mEMMjOW80/edit>