

EXPERIENCES FROM AN EFL TEACHER: AN INTERCULTURAL LIFE-STORY
PURSUING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN THE USA

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Abstract

The present autobiographical study under the narrative inquiry approach depicts the factors, events, and experiences that had influenced a pre-service teacher's life in her process of pursuing a proficient English level and constructing her identity. This study describes why the researcher decided to learn English, how is to learn and teach a language in a distance modality, and the intercultural encounters the student had while studying, working, and living abroad. This narrative inquiry had an autobiographical approach and collected instruments included biographical documents, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The researcher concludes that intercultural experiences are significant for pre-service teachers because they are part of the pre-service teacher identity, it potentiates professional, personal, cultural, pedagogical, research, spiritual and linguistic skills. In addition, students and pre-service teachers who are exposed to different intercultural contexts got a broader perspective towards other cultures and languages. Finally, the researcher concludes the importance of applying narratives in research as an option to offer research possibilities for those students who do not have a learning process available to investigate.

Keywords: narratives studies, identity, studying abroad, cultural awareness.

Resumen

El presente estudio autobiográfico bajo el enfoque de indagación narrativa describe los factores, eventos y experiencias que influyeron en la vida de una futura maestra en su proceso de búsqueda de un nivel de inglés competente y construcción de su identidad. Este estudio describe por qué la investigadora decidió aprender inglés, cómo es aprender y enseñar un idioma en la modalidad a distancia, y los encuentros interculturales que tuvo el estudiante mientras estudiaba, trabajaba y vivía en el extranjero. Esta indagación narrativa tuvo un enfoque autobiográfico y los instrumentos recopilados incluyeron documentos biográficos, encuestas y entrevistas semiestructuradas. La investigadora concluye que las experiencias interculturales son significativas para los futuros docentes porque forman parte de la identidad de los futuros docentes, potencian competencias profesionales, personales, culturales, pedagógicas, investigativas, espirituales y lingüísticas. Además, los estudiantes y futuros docentes que están expuestos a diferentes contextos interculturales obtuvieron una perspectiva más amplia hacia otras culturas e idiomas. Finalmente, la investigadora concluye la importancia de aplicar las narrativas en la investigación como una opción para ofrecer posibilidades de investigación a aquellos estudiantes que no tienen un proceso de aprendizaje disponible para investigar.

Palabras clave: estudios de narrativas, identidad, estudiar en el exterior, conciencia cultural.

1. Contextualization.

The present autobiographical study under the narrative inquiry approach illustrates the factors, events, and experiences that had influenced a pre-service teacher's life in her process of pursuing a proficient English level. This study describes why the researcher decided to learn English and how the process of feeling this need incentive her to start a Bachelor's in English, in a distance modality. The concept of distance learning is used because it involves in-person interaction with of the University. This story continues with the fact that even when studying English in a distance environment, and at extracurricular schools, the goals of achieving a knowledgeable and communicative English level seemed to be getting further away, causing discouragement that perhaps others in her same position have felt. This desire for more efficient performance in the language to fulfill academic and/or professional demands pushed the pre-service teacher to leave her comfort zone and emigrate to the United States through an exchange program, "Au Pair". The exchange program Au pair is not designed for academic purposes, instead it has worked as a strategy and tool for Language and professional development. According to Bustamante (2018) "The Au Pair" program has been increasingly the more feasible way moneywise, long-lasting and preferred immersion among young people and through their narratives, (...) is known towards the academic community, as a basis-study for further research in ELT" (p.2.)

However, in this journey the pre-service teacher had to face many challenges and processes regarding her language fluency and cultural adaptation. But at the same time, it opened plenty of opportunities to learn not just English but the Culture and history of the United States and other cultures that reside in this country such as immigrants and an American and Korean Family that she lived with; which increased her cultural awareness. Moreover, there are some

reflections upon how English knowledge acquisition was; while telling her own experiences. As well as, reflections on determining which significant cultural learning can be applied as teaching and learning techniques in future practices. Finally, this study intends to work as a tool for future researchers, pre-service teachers, English learners to reflect on, question, and learn from their own stories and experiences, understanding their power as it was for the researcher. Additionally, the benefit of sharing life stories, because no matter how long or short a life story is, there is always something to learn, and there will always be someone going through the same. Likewise, the narrative's inquiries can be seen as a pragmatic approach, as they help the teacher and students become reflective and critical thinkers (Chan, 2017).

2. Research Statement

The following research intends to describe the events and experiences of a Colombian English pre-service teacher at Santo Tomas University, who has continued studying for her Bachelor's degree, in a distance modality, while residing in the United States (US) for two years through an exchange program Au pair. This narrative inquiry is an autobiography and life history study that intends to go beyond telling stories (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007), because this also seeks to reflect how the necessity and desire for pursuing an English proficiency level and a Bachelor's Degree incentivize the pre-service teacher to leave her comfort zone and move to the US. While telling how to be immersed in this intercultural country, it has contributed to her personal and professional development.

Moreover, through describing these experiences, such as studying and living abroad, it is possible to get a critical insight about which strengths and weaknesses she has found through her journey that perhaps others have experienced too. In fact, according to Viafara González & Ariza

Ariza (2015) "traveling abroad has become one of the most desired options for university learners to acquire and develop foreign language skills and knowledge of the target culture" (p.124). Thus, this paper will give the readers a chance to be informed and make their conclusions while considering these life events, which might motivate, inspire or question themselves. Furthermore, this study intends to empower the researcher's voice because, as Riessman emphasizes, 'Narratives invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator' (2008, as cited in Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010, p.3).

Consequently, it is essential to state that the pre-service teacher's experiences content an exposition to a variation of cultures through two years living in the U.S. For example, the pre-service teacher had the opportunity to learn the English language in programs such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in face to face, and Online modalities. ESOL programs are English classes that the U.S. government and some Universities in the U.S. and most of the English Native Countries offer. These programs seek to allow the non-English speaking communities to adapt to their new cultural or migratory contexts. Within these classes, the non-native speakers become part of a community of learners from all ages, English levels, different backgrounds, and cultures. This community learns both the formal e informal grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of American spoken and written English.

Furthermore, these ESOL programs have served as a bridge for the pre-service teacher to learn and improve her English skills, as well as to get engaged with U.S. history and culture. In addition, she could share classes and cultural experiences with people from other cultures that she did not expect to meet or perhaps she did not thought it would be possible toknow; such as Asians, Europeans, Middle Easterners, and Africans; whose native tongues were not Spanish or English, and the only way to communicate was using English. Eventually, the exposition to

other cultures and beliefs transformed aspects of the pre-service teacher identity; these factors are portrayed through this study.

On the other hand, for this research it is considered the parameters given by the (B.A.) Bachelor English program at “DUAD” (División de Educación Abierta y a Distancia) at Santo Tomas University. As stated by Bonilla, Hernández, and Medina (2017) parameters that propose macro projects and subprojects as a new didactic and methodology options to facilitate the development and assessment of research. The LLEI (Licenciatura en Lengua extranjera Ingles) macro projects and subprojects allows researchers to reflect on their practices and contextual factors that affect the process of teaching and learning and make visible those unheard and unknown voices of teachers and learners. The research at the LLEI (Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera, Inglés) is divided into two fields: Field number one, 'the teaching and learning of English as Foreign language' and field number two, 'The study of the English language and its contexts.

In this case, this study will apply field number two, emphasizing the research macro project two, 'understanding and characterizing English foreign Language (EFL) in the (LLEI); Experiences and phenomena in the pre-service teachers' educational contexts'. And the research Subproject three, 'The voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and experiences.' (Bonilla et al., 2017). In short, this study is framed in the Research Subproject three of the (LLEI), because it motivates the researchers, participants, and future readers to understand the value of their own stories and could encourage them to express it through narratives.

2.1. Research question

How does an English pre-service teacher achieve English proficiency while studying a Distance Bachelor's Degree and living in the USA?

2.2. Research objectives

2.2.1 General objective

To portray the life story of an English pre-service teacher and experiences while studying in a distance bachelor's degree and living abroad in the USA.

2.2.2 Specific objectives

- To describe how the telling of personal experiences may bring a critical insight perspective on English teaching in its own context through a narrative inquiry.
- To demonstrate that experiences abroad could be significant for the English pre-service teacher.
- To interpret the intercultural characteristics that influenced the researcher's life, from an academic and professional perspective.
- To establish what factors motivated the pre-service teacher to leave the comfort zone and immigrate to the U.S.

3. Theoretical Framework

Through recognizing the different events and experiences, lived by the pre-service teacher during an international exchange program in the U.S. while pursuing an English proficiency level and an English teaching Bachelor's Degree, the most beneficial approach to

develop this research study is the narrative inquiry. The key concepts are narrative inquiry, life experiences of English pre-service teachers, autobiographical research, intercultural learning, and distance education. These concepts are going to be described and analyzed in the following paragraphs.

3.1. Narrative Inquiry

The narrative Inquiry is an important tool that allows the participants of any study to share their lived experiences to analyze and comprehend the significance of their experiences. In other words, based on Clandinin (2006) “Narrative Inquiries study the individual’s experience in the world, an experience that was storied both in the living and telling, which could be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, writing, and interpreting texts” (p. 46). Through the process of this Inquiry, the English preservice teacher will reflect, interpret episodes, events relating to the power of her experience, and the meaning of this for her life and for her professional development. As advocated Clandinin and Connelly (2000, as cited in Chan, 2017) “narrative inquiry in which storytelling is acknowledged as a powerful tool for reflection on what personal practical knowledge teachers have and how such knowledge was formulated” (p.25). Certainly, narratives are meaningful and necessary because they will guide the researcher to contextualize how the English and cultural learning was acquired.

Moreover, narrative inquiry can guide us to understand language teaching and learning from teachers' perspective and their experiences and identities in language teaching and learning as life experiences. When the narrative inquiry is applied to language learning, it is seen as applied linguistics, and it can be composed of oral narratives or written narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). In this context, the narrative inquiry is the bridge between the participant or researcher's lived experiences and the outcome of the language learning. Also, as sustained by

Barkhuizen et al. (2014) "self-narratives, or the stories people tell about themselves, help us to understand how individuals situate themselves and their activities in the world" p.2.

3.2. Experiences of English pre-service teachers abroad.

In this study, recognizing the significance of English pre-service teachers' life experiences is one of the primary foundations and intentions because, based on this, it is possible to understand what English pre-service teachers have to face through their own journeys and how this aspect can be beneficial for others. According to Chan (2017) "adopting narratives means analyzing the essence of lived experiences that involve the student-teacher, to take a more active role in her or his learning to reflect on how past experiences inform practices" (p.23). Once it is possible to understand the process of learning, it is practical to apply this in the classroom, based on each student's needs. Also, this process as an educational activity, "prompts reflections that promote active learning and critical thinking" (Chan, 2017, p.23). In this sense, the interest of learning about others' life experiences is to analyze the similarities and differences between the events, the needs, practices, and feelings they had during their sojourn learning English or overseas, and the relation or reflection with what the researcher lived.

In addition, it is relevant to analyze the researcher's motivations to leave her home country and start a Journey in the U.S. As well as her need to achieve an English proficiency level, which came from a distressing situation of not feeling able to get the competencies needed in her country where the predominant language is Spanish. These skills are fundamental to teach the subject, pass the qualifying exams, and communicate in the language, but not in all cases, it is possible to acquire them if you do not have contact with the language every day. Unfortunately, this is a reality that many English learners and teachers have to face at not being able to approve these "required" standards, which in some cases forces them to seek alternative

solutions, such as investing in expensive English courses, immersion programs, immigrating, among others.

For instance, Bustamante (2008) states "for English teachers, the evaluation that measures them on their competences in English is very unsatisfactory; facts, show the importance of supporting language fluency through any sort of immersion may offer real possibilities for cultural awareness training, and that may suit the students and pre-service teachers' demands for becoming fluent in English" (p.22). Despite that being part of an educational immersion or exchange program seems to be a practical way to increase the English proficiency level, not everyone can access this because most of them are not affordable, or they cannot meet the requirements of age, time, or civil status.

However, one option in the case of Colombian English pre-service teachers, that meet certain requirements, is to apply to programs abroad that involve a study and work settings as the researcher did. Finally, giving a voice and learning about these life stories might give the others Colombian English as a foreign language student teachers' opportunity to grow as educators and apply to international sojourns, which despite not always subsume the traditional study and residence abroad goal (González & Ariza Ariza, 2015), they are beneficial for their foreign language acquisition and intercultural learning. Which in the future will contribute to "avoid misunderstandings related to cross-cultural situations, and misinterpretations when social interaction happens in a foreign context" (Bustamante, 2018).

3.3. Intercultural learning

Intercultural learning is considered as one of the essential human learning competencies because it allows society to share their customs, habits, religions, which make every culture be

different, but at the same time unique. As language learners it is needed to focus linguistic and sociolinguistics aspects, and the understanding of a culture is significant for human development, and various have centered the attention on that (Deardorff, 2006). However, in the language use and context, “if language teachers can perceive, understand, and value their own culture and other cultures, they may be able to cope more efficiently with differences in their classrooms” (Ramos, 2013). For that reason, the pre-service teachers are required to study the development of intercultural competence to impact and strengthen the life perspective of their students and their roles in the classrooms.

To define interculturality is relevant, recognize that this concept is often confused with multiculturalism or multiculturalism (Dervin, 2010) despite similarities they are not the same. Multiculturalism is recognized as the result of the cohabitation of different cultures and the concept of interculturality is associated with the educational world, as the process that allows people of different cultural backgrounds to communicate among themselves (Ramos, 2013). The opportunity to explore different cultural backgrounds is given to many students, teachers, travelers, migrants, people who decide to reside in a different context or culture than their own. Thus, this experience became an important tool to achieve a different target of language, culture, habits, and broad-mindedness.

Moreover, intercultural competence is explained as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes between several cultural areas. This competence is achieved when language teachers can perceive, understand, and value their own culture, other cultures, and how it may help to cope efficiently with differences in their classrooms (Ramos, 2013). Besides, it shows the importance of understanding the diversity in Colombia’s English classrooms and how values, abilities, behaviors co-exist in order to comprehend the interculturality of other contexts and their

language. In other words, it shows the importance of understanding our own culture, context, and the culture and context of the language to study, in this case, English.

Ultimately, the approach of intercultural learning in education, according to UNESCO (2006) “aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding, respect for dialogue between the different cultural groups” (p.18). Therefore, through this research, those concepts will demonstrate how, based on intercultural experiences, it is possible to contribute to the education field mechanisms to promote acceptance and tolerance between cultures. These concepts are collected in an autobiographical study.

3.4. Autobiographical narrative

In this narrative inquiry the concept of autobiographical is used instead of biographical based on the distinction between them. “In biographical approaches, the researchers analyze or tell participants’ stories; while in autobiographical research, they analyze or tell their own stories” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p.4). For the researcher to recall and tell self-lived stories and experiences from a qualitative perspective, will lead her to rebuild the meaning inside them. Besides, autobiographies are significant because, according to Johnson (1999, as cited in Rueda, 2020) "Autobiographies are the best way to capture the richness and prior experiences and get a critical analysis of those experiences and beliefs to better comprehend the difficulties and complexities in teachers, teaching and learning" (p.15). In other words, autobiographies empower stories lived as learners or teachers and guides to understand how present, past, and future actions or events shape the identity and enrich the teaching practice.

Moreover, according to Rosenthal (2004) "was published in Germany in 1978 by Martin Kohli and an international reader by French sociologist Daniel Bertaux¹ followed in 1981" (p.48). This method's primary use was to understand social reality and the association to behavioral patterns, and over time, it started to be applied in educational settings. In this context, the autobiographical study seeks to collect the participants' life stories and understand what their stories mean for the participants and the potential that may impact others. According to Rosenthal (2004)

We want to find out what they experienced, what meaning they gave their actions at the time, what meaning they assign today, and in what biographically constituted context they place their experiences; to be able to understand and explain the statements about particular topics and experiences (...) as part of the overall context (...) resulting present, and future perspective. (p.50)

For the researcher, not all the events have the same meaning or have influenced her life the same way, some are positive and some negative but all of them have contributed to the development of the researcher's identity. Thus, autobiography is retrospective prose of narrative produced by a real person concerning his/her own existence, focusing on his/her individual life, in particular on the development of his/her personality (Lejeune, 1975, as cited in Donado 2019). By writing her biography, the researcher will establish connections between the aspects that have influenced her life, who she has become, as well as the educational setting through distance education.

3.5. Distance Education.

Distance education or distance learning is a modality or format of education that allows students to be part of learning programs without the necessity of being physically present at an institution when receiving a lesson but that present a synchronic or asynchronous interaction with their tutors, facilitating the communication, promoting self-learning. The focus of this learning modality is to use technology as a tool for those with a desire to learn, and achieve their professional goals but with some obstacles of distance, costs, and time. According to the Colombian Ministry of National Education [MEN] (2017) “Distance education appeared in the social context as a solution to the problems of coverage and quality that afflicted a large number of people, who wanted to benefit from the pedagogical, scientific and technical advances that certain institutions had achieved, but which were inaccessible due to the geographical location or because of the high costs involved in frequent or permanent travel to these locations” (para. 3). Distance education has contributed significantly to society for the flexibility it contains.

Another definition is given by 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 (...) for the provision 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, this modality has evolved as technology advances, with it the teaching and learning methods it contains. According to MEN (2017), there are three generations of distance learning; the first generation of distance education was characterized by using a single technology and little communication between teachers and students. Besides, in this modality, students received a series of materials by correspondence, which contained information and guidance to carry out their assignments and tests. This generation was also known as print-based correspondence education because it mainly used written and printed texts and postal services. The second generation introduced other technologies and a greater possibility of interaction between the teacher and the student. Likewise, students receive audio or video cassettes, radio programs. Thus, this generation is often referred to as the “industrial model” of distance education because of its specialized division of labor in producing and delivering instructional materials and the potential to educate thousands of students at once (Aoki, 2011).

Finally, the third generation was characterized for using information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide direct and foster interaction between the teacher and his students through the computer. In which e-mail, discussion groups, and other tools offer accurate communication and extended delivery of content. Another important fact of this generation in terms of technology was the introduction to social media or so-called Web 2.0, which transformed the learning experiences in distance education. In addition, the wide availability of The Open Educational Resources (OER) reduces the content production load by distance education institutions and enables them to focus more on learner support and design for learning (Aoki, 2011).

However, in March of 2020, the education system globally was affected, perhaps creating a temporary fourth generation of Distance Education known as remote learning. This generation

emerged as an intervention of emergency due to the global outbreak (COVID-19), which was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. As a result, countries worldwide requested and warned the public to take responsive care strategies to flatten the curve and control the transmission of the disease. Such as hand washing, wearing face masks, physical distancing, avoiding mass gatherings, assemblies, and lockdown, staying home, and closing all schools around the globe (Sintema, 2020). Unfortunately, more than 168 million cases have been confirmed and around 3.5 million deaths worldwide (BBC News, 2021, Covid-19: cómo la teoría del origen del coronavirus en un laboratorio de Wuhan pasó de "conspiración" a ser investigada, para. 11).

4. Research design

4.1. Autobiographical study through narrative inquiry

The underpinning of narrative inquiry as a design, is to give meaning to lived experiences, help the researchers, learners, and participants to embrace the significance hidden behind their stories, and tell their perception of the world. As well as comprehend how these events shape their lives and the probable effects on others. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) "Educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead and tell lived stories, and this narrative studies the ways humans experience the world" (p,2). The researcher's stories, experiences, and reflections are the subject of the study in this paper. The researcher is a student and former English practitioner of the Bachelor in English program from the Santo Tomas University, Bogota. In this regard, this paper adopted an autobiographical approach. Autobiographical approaches in narrative inquiry "are an important vehicle for understanding human condition because it offers insights into people's worlds and it

provides the insider's view of phenomena and experiences" (Yung, 2019, p.67). Moreover, restating Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik's (2014) perspective, narrative inquiry is relevant in this research because it helps to understand the inner mental worlds of language teachers and learners and the nature of language teaching and learning as a social and educational activity. Thus, through this narrative, the researcher will reflect on how the experience living and studying abroad has provided learning, teaching, and social tools significant for the development as an English pre-service teacher.

In addition, each narrative inquiry follows some principles and features, which can be adopted according to the needs and interests of the researchers, teachers, learners, and participants, based on Barkhuizen et al., (2014).

Narratives are spoken or written texts; They are produced by people who have something to tell; They are situated in time and space involving development over time; They have structures that correspond to the developments they describe; They encapsulate a point that the narrator wants to get across; They have purpose and meaning within the context of their telling. (p. 7)

In this sense, this narrative is multimodal with spoken and written information, and different instruments were used to collect and analyze the data. These will give a voice to the aspects that have built the researcher's English and intercultural knowledge, such as experiences and reflections as a learner, practitioner, and Colombian immigrant.

4.2 Autobiographical study

The primary participant of this autobiographical study is the researcher, who will study her own narrative. However, some witnesses stated important aspects and gave information

about the researcher. These witnesses had a particular grade of closeness to the researcher, and each one had followed her narrative from a contrasting perspective or context. Thus, the group of witnesses was formed by three professors of the Bachelor in English from the Santo Tomas University, who guided the researcher in academic subjects such as Advanced and Academic English, teaching practicum, and research in action. Also, two classmates from the bachelor in English; One of them had met the researcher from her first days within the bachelor, and the other one met her when she was already in the intercultural immersion, and had similar experiences abroad as an au pair and as part of the bachelor in English. Moreover, the (host mom) was a person who hosted and hired the researcher for two years when she was an au pair and as an international student. Finally, other voices formed by a group of eight Au pairs from Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and El Salvador with similar characteristics to the researcher.

4.2.1. The participant

The participant in this autobiographical study is the researcher who lived, analysed and narrated the events investigated. The research process that has been developed by the researcher, was a rigorous process of recognizing the concepts related to the framework, establishing the instruments, which were reviewed by the thesis director and witnesses before being applied, defines trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; 2013). Also, the process is trustworthy due that the researcher collected the data from primary sources and selected different mechanisms to apply triangulation between the researcher's narrative, the semi-structured interviews, and the survey. According to Denzin (1989; as cited in Barkhuizen, et al., 2014) narratives can show life as experienced and lived, understanding:

“1. What “things” were like, how events occurred (findings from the sphere of the reality of life).

2. How “things” and events were experienced by the respondents

3. How “things” and events are narrated by the respondents (findings from the sphere of the reality of the text)”.(p. 90)

Moreover, the instruments were applied online, in different periods of time, these instruments were reviewed and modified a couple of times before being applied. The first instrument was the autobiography, it was written in English, and the writing process began in November 2020, it was updated based on the experiences the researcher was living, and the last modification was in June 2021. Besides, the application of the semi-structured interviews began in June 2021 and ended in July 2021. The type witnesses were because they knew the researcher. Five of the interviews were applied in the primary language of the participants (Spanish) and one of them in the participant's second language (English). Finally, the survey was applied in English and Spanish, giving the other voices the option to choose the language of their preference. Thus, some extracts of the data, in general, are in English and others in Spanish.

4.3 Data collection instruments

Since it is common in narrative inquiry to adopt multiple data collection methods (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), to support this document and to identify the events that occurred in the process of achieving English proficiency, the researcher has decided to apply semi-structured interviews, the researcher's autobiographical document, and a survey.

Firstly, *semi-structured interviews* ([appendix a](#)) were applied to the three professors of the Bachelor in English, two classmates, and the host mom; these participants were mentioned above. The purpose is to discover aspects of the researcher's English learning process, how the events happened, the professional, personal growth (if any), and highlighted attitudes from the

perspective of others who have lived the process with the researcher and which answers are reliable. Semi-structured interviews are most used form in language teaching research because the interviewer here uses the interview guide with pre-set questions, and the use of semi-structured interviews gives a certain degree of flexibility so that as the interview progresses, the interviewer will ask follow-up questions for the interviewee to clarify or elaborate on the subject (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Secondly, *the autobiographical document* (appendix b) whose purpose is to portray the researcher's personal and cultural experiences while learning English in her home country and abroad, before, during, and beyond the B.A. in English, and the connection between language and culture. In addition, the autobiographical document will point out stories that happened within specific places or situations that provided meaningful insights and awareness into the socioeconomic and cultural context of the pre-service teacher (Creswell, 2013) that otherwise may not have been examined. This aspect is necessary, considering the need to prepare teachers not only to teach effectively but to work with students whose race, culture, and socioeconomic background might be different (Dawn & Smith, 2016) whose consciousness and empathy in the area could become a personal and professional strength.

Finally, a *survey* (appendix c) to eight Au pairs, pre-service teachers, and from other careers, with the purpose of reflecting the researcher's journey not only through her voice but the voice of others, also to discover if others have lived the same process adjustment, experiences, interculturality exposition abroad, or to understand and see if these events are unique to the researcher or if the stories are shared. It was applied to nine Au pairs, pre-service teachers, and other careers from different nationalities who have lived in California, among other states from the United States, some questions were taken from Bustamante (2018).

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Type of analysis: Thematic analysis

The data analysis process began after completing the transcription of the interviews, the writing of the autobiography document, and the application and transcript of the survey. This process was followed by thematic analysis, which according to Barkhuizen et al., (2014) “Thematic analysis involves the repeated reading of the data, coding, and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings” p.75. The data analysis was developed based on open coding followed by axial coding. The purpose of open coding was to provide new insights beyond the basics and try to explain or narrate the phenomenon reflected in the data (Corbin, & Strauss, 1990).

Moreover, the intention with axial coding was to read the codes and basic data to find out how to group them into categories. Thus, based on the researcher's investigative interest and experiences before applying the data collection instruments, some broad categories were pre-established. First, to focus on understanding the language learning process regarding the researcher's experience learning English before, during, and after the B.A. in English program. Second, to understand the researcher's intercultural learning and the acquisition process before and during the intercultural immersion. Third, the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of learning English through the B.A program and cultural immersions.

In addition, the data collected came from primary sources (raw data), and in the interpretation process, the data (events, actions, interaction) were analyzed, compared, and labeled “coded”. The codes were underlining using different colors based on their relevance. For example, the events or codes related to the **language acquisition process** were marked with blue

color. For codes related **intercultural learning**, the red color was used. However, after the coding and drawing connections between them in axial coding, the categories changed, and one category was added related to **personal and professional aspects**, to underline these codes the yellow color was used.

After the underlining, these codes were excerpted in a matrix of thematic analysis (excel format), and the repeated events, actions, and interactions were grouped to form narrow categories and subcategories. The main categories are three, the first one is achieving an English proficiency that contains three subcategories number one, starting my learning process, the second developing my linguistics skills in a B.A. program and the third exceeding of competencies in an experience abroad. Moreover, the second category is Cultural and intercultural aspects that underpin the learning process of a language. The subcategory is Learning English in Colombia vs. Learning English abroad in terms of cultural aspects. Finally, the third category is constructing personal and professional identity while learning English, and the subcategory is aspects related to personal and professional development.

5.2. Category 1. Achieving English proficiency

The first category gives an input of how the process of learning a foreign language was and leads to the understanding of how and when the events occurred from the voice of the researcher and participants. Therefore, in a timeline, it is retelling how this process was, when the first foreign language awareness was, how the development of linguistic skills in a B.A. program occurred, which opportunities and challenges were around this, and finally, how these English competencies exceeded through an experience abroad.

Subcategory 1: Starting the learning process

The researcher's English learning process began in the last years of high school. Despite that, English was one of the subjects required in the curriculum of the schools, English was only taught in the last grades of the secondary school, this was a common situation among public schools, and English was only a privilege for private schools. Perhaps this lack of opportunities was one of the aspects that unconsciously motivated the researcher to seek other ways not only to learn the language but to apply her knowledge to contribute to society, perhaps through teaching or social causes, as is depicted in the following excerpt: "*My dream has always been to find a way to transform, empower, or change the world by reaching out to the ones with fewer opportunities, and I am finding my way through the English Language*" (Biography). As seen in the previous example from the Biography, the researcher saw English as a tool that will allow her to be a changing actor in society and benefit people around her.

Nevertheless, those last years of high school came with aspects that stand out positively, such as the fact of learning English from Foreign teacher assistants' part of an intercultural exchange program at least a few hours a week. There were teachers that also saw English as a great opportunity, not only for the foreigners who were going to get teaching experience but also for students of public schools who really needed the opportunity of learning, as is depicted in the following excerpt:

Intercultural exchange program required them to work teaching English, as English assistants. At that time in my school, there were foreigners from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, and France teaching English, despite the fact that they were not English native Speakers, their accent, fluency, and teaching techniques made it easier to learn English. (Biography)

Regardless of the few English classes that the researcher took with these exchange teachers, these events awakened in the researcher a deeper desire of learning a foreign language and gave her an awareness about the cultures and languages abroad. However, in those years of High school, there were also events that discourage the researcher from learning the language, since she had to move to another school, which focus was business and not English but this school had a higher academic level, somehow it was difficult for her to adapt and keep up with other students, so she started living experiences in terms of English learning that constrained the learning process. For example; *“I was told in my last years of high school that I wasn't born to speak in English, to learn English, that I was too bad at it. (...) don't even try it (do not lose your money)”*(Biography). Thus, despite secondary teachers having a great English level, the fact that they remarked on the researcher's difficulties and barriers, created discouragement, frustration, and negative feelings towards the foreign language, causing the researcher a lack of interest.

Unfortunately, those events lead the researcher to shift her mindset from the desire for knowledge and learning the language, to completing tasks and requirements needed to graduate. As seen in this other excerpt:

English professors had an excellent level but their methodology was so overwhelming. They used to speak fast and with complex words that learning English stopped being enjoyable and became stressful, so I just focused on finding ways to pass exams and approve semesters rather than actually learning. (Biography)

Regardless of these, for the researcher, the frustration towards the English Language somehow, became one of her biggest motivations when she decided to start the Bachelor in English program. Before taking the risk of applying to University and with the desire of

overcoming the discouraging words, events from high school, and the absence of vision towards the future, the researcher decided to take a sabbatical. A sabbatical in Colombia is a common practice among high school graduate students, who do not know what to study, who do not have the financial resources to apply to higher education level, or who simply, want to explore alternative careers or courses, such as languages, art, music, etc. In the researcher's case, she used the sabbatical to take an English course, which brought many benefits for her, as seeing below:

When I finished that one-year English course I learned a lot of vocabulary and some grammar structures. I even started recognizing some vocabulary and my listening skills improved more than in those last 2 years of high school, regardless I had the same 6 hours weekly, maybe because it was shorter lessons and more days within the week. (Autobiography)

Another benefit after the sabbatical was the empowerment within the researcher's mind which caused her to find opportunities to go and fulfill her dreams of becoming English fluent and transforming the realities of others through education. Therefore, the researcher decided to apply for a bachelor's degree in English at the Santo Tomas University, in Chiquinquirá and later on transferred to Bogota.

Subcategory 2: Developing linguistics skills in a B.A. program

The bachelor in English from the Santo Tomas University was one of the doors that opened in the researcher's life, which not only gave the researcher the tools to develop professionally as a teacher but also to improve her English and become fluent in the language. However, there were different situations through the B.A. that caused the researcher to believe that she must give up in her language learning process, one of them being the challenges that distance students face while learning in this methodology. Students of this distance methodology need to have a high level of autonomy and commitment, but most of these students work and study, so it makes it difficult sometimes to fulfill the personal and professional responsibilities, for example:

The first English semester was a mess because the language requirements were high and my English level was too low. Despite that, my English professors from the bachelor's gave me the best tools and the English content was excellent, and there were alternative opportunities to practice English, such as conversational clubs before classes on Saturdays. Unfortunately, I couldn't advance at all. Perhaps for me, it was difficult to handle the idea of working full time, with a long commute, studying English, and adapting to a new cultural environment. (Autobiography)

The struggles from the previous excerpt taken from the biography were not only noticed by the researcher on her own experience, but for her classmates as seeing next: *“Lo que notaba era que se le dificultaba el estudio, en el sentido de que no era muy aplicada, digamos que tenía otros intereses o prioridades, según lo que me decía trabajaba mucho y se le*

dificultaba el inglés (Int 3)”. It was also noticed by her professors ‘Ella sentía que necesitaba fortalecer mucho más el desarrollo de habilidades en inglés’ (Int2). Even though the researcher was exposed to some English native speakers and her professors from the B.A. and alternative English courses that she was taking had an excellent English level; 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.

Another challenge was the pedagogical and research aspects that students of the B.A and Distance methodology face in general bases, as proof of it the following excerpt:

Cuando ella es mi estudiante en Foundation in EFL research and Methodology in EFL research, yo percibo que estaba en una búsqueda por definir cómo sería el desarrollo investigativo dentro de la licenciatura. Había, por un lado, una sensación de incertidumbre de parte de ella y también temores. No solamente en ella, sino en otros. Un temor claro que sienten los estudiantes cuando llegan a sexto semestre es el hecho de que tengan varios espacios académicos en inglés, Y más cuando ellos se enfrentan a un espacio de investigación. (Int 2)

The previous excerpt reflects that some events lived by the researcher in this methodology were uncertain for her, as well as many students face in their search for better opportunities. In addition, these difficulties could cause some students to drop out and not continue with their professional development. Despite some adversities, the methodology and especially the B.A. have been a crucial aspect in the development of the researcher's linguistic skills, since there were extra environments that allowed the

researcher to practice the language, such as conversational clubs, which were led by teachers of the B.A., and whose participants were students of the same degree, and from all semesters. Regardless of the feeling of sorrow or doubt, these English clubs allowed the researcher to interact with others, which was helpful for her learning process, allowing her to learn more vocabulary and giving her hope about herself in this process, as seeing below:

Ella participó cuando había club de conversación en Inglés (...) eran espacios donde practicar y donde ella pudiera medirse frente a otras personas, estar en contacto con otras personas era lo que le hacía falta para desarrollar esa confianza y darse cuenta de que en realidad sí lo estaba haciendo bien. (Int 5)

Another benefit that the B.A. offers for those students who have struggled as the researcher when facing several English and research subjects was/is the “Semillero investigativo” also led by professors of the B.A, which intends to start forming in the students an awareness and to expand their training in how to develop research in the field of education while strengthening their English skills. The invitation to be involved in these scenarios is constantly given by professors of the B.A. due the content and relevance *"Le hacía un llamado para que aprovechara las técnicas de investigación que estábamos aprendiendo, que aprendiera a manejar recursos de datos (Int 2)."*

However, the lack of confidence was one of the aspects that created a barrier between the researcher and moving forward in the learning process. As seen below the fear towards communicating in English was one aspect remarked by professors of the B.A.:

El primer encuentro fue en el 2018, en Intermediate English 1. (...) A pesar de que ella era una persona muy dedicada (...) tenía una dificultad en el tema

del speaking. En esa parte la trabajamos mucho y no era falta de, digamos, de conocimiento frente al idioma, frente a las estructuras, frente a todo lo que implicaba la lengua, sino frente a ella en el momento de expresarse. (...) Ella como que se cerraba o dejaba que la angustia o la ansiedad, estuviera ahí en el espacio y eso le afectaba mucho. Yo le daba muchas oportunidades, le hablaba mucho sobre la pronunciación (...) más que ansiedad, era como falta de confianza. (Int 5)

Despite being intentional with the English lessons and participating in the spaces mentioned before, there was still a need to break the barrier that did not allow her to communicate in English. For language learners, the lack of exposure to the foreign language is one reason that creates difficulties for communicating and expressing what is learned in the language classrooms; this is why some learners look for alternatives such as intercultural exchanges to be immersed in the language. Based on an excerpt taken from the survey applied to eight participants, the motivation of language learners for participating in these programs abroad could vary depending on the individual but some common reasons are related to “improve English and know more about the culture of the United States” (Survey, P1), last reason was also stated by participant 3. In contrast the participant number four presented a new one reason when she stated that “porque al ser una experiencia de intercambio cultural, puedo aprender inglés, así compartir mis tradiciones y cultura con la familia extranjera” (Survey, P4). Also participant number seven said “para alcanzar un nivel más alto dentro del Marco Común Europeo” (Survey, P7). Finally, another reason stated that motivated this kind of

experience abroad was stated by participant number eight when she says “para mejorar el inglés y así para aplicar a una beca en el extranjero” (Survey, P7).

According to the previous reasons presented, the researcher was able to identify the value and impact that an exchange program will have in her life, in her English learning process, and in her career. However, there was in her a feeling of discouragement towards the language, and she felt incapable of ever being completely exposed to the language and face conversations with native speakers. However, when the researcher had an encounter with one of her professors from the bachelor English and heard her testimonial, the researcher became motivated for seeking forms to exceed her linguistic competencies, leave her safe zone and apply to an exchange program to the United States, as seen in the excerpt below:

I was done with English and about to change my career but suddenly, I met an English teacher at my University from the B.A program, told me some aspects of her personal life, her career, and when she told me that because of English she had lived in other countries (despite some cultural and professional challenges she faced), something in my perspective changed. I decided to push myself harder, to give English another chance. (Biography)

Thus, the researcher was not only impacted by the certainty with which the teacher stated that through her experience studying and working abroad, in an English-speaking country, she had also achieved her English proficiency. But also, she felt encouraged through the words of her professor, who always emphasized that what the researcher needed was to be fully immersed in the language, in order to consolidate

her English language knowledge, since the more often she speaks, listens, writes, reads, the more quickly she would learn, as seen below:

Un día yo me la encontré a ella [myself] en el edificio total de la DUAD y le pregunté pues en que estaba, ella ya me había manifestado que tenía la intención de viajar y le dije eso es lo que tú necesitas, ir y realmente medirse en la realidad, ya no en virtual, ya no frente a un libro, frente a un computador, sino con gente real. Y yo la motivé mucho, incluso le conté mi experiencia de vida y le dije que eso era lo que le iba a ayudar a sentirse más segura. A darse cuenta de que ella ya tiene lo que necesita, lo que le faltaba era ese salto (Int 5)

Finally, not all language learners have opportunities to travel abroad to strengthen their language skills, likewise, not everyone needs to leave their country to achieve high English levels. However, the researcher recognized that if she did not take the step of traveling abroad to an English-speaking country, she might not complete her Bachelor's degree since it requires her to be fluent in English, and in the future, teach it to others who perhaps would have difficulties to learn it like her. Moreover, not all learning modalities provide the opportunity to continue the professional training while the participants are living outside the country; it makes the distance-learning model, especially the Bachelor in English from the Santo Tomas University, an excellent opportunity for people like the researcher, who needed to apply what she learned in the classrooms within situational contexts.

Subcategory 3: Exceeding my competencies in an experience abroad

Traveling abroad allowed the researcher to grow in many areas of her life, but one significant improvement was her English and confidence. The researcher's journey abroad in the United States began in the last semester of 2018 and continues to 2022. There were different settings and events that the researcher had to face in order to adjust to the language, but despite the highs and lows, the goal of becoming English fluent at least in an advanced level was accomplished. As seen in the following excerpt, there were aspects that she did not anticipate but they contributed to her learning process:

I found different ways to practice and Study English within my experience; in Florida, I took English classes at a college, a big American Community surrounded me, my host kids had an excellent English level so they were my best tutors. I never expected that I was going to learn English and improve my confidence playing dolls, singing kids songs or Reading Story tales with them but it happened. In addition, my English improvement was huge; I finally could apply what I had in my notebooks in my everyday life. In addition, I even started attending a Christian American Church, where the sermons were in American English I also started volunteering and attending bible study clubs in English. (Autobiography)

The term “host” is given to people from a foreign country who receive students or exchange workers "Au pairs" into their homes, giving them board, food, and a salary. In the researcher's case, the host kids were the children to whom she provided childcare services. Although she interacted every day with other family members, her primary contact in a working setting were the children, who turned out to enjoy teaching the researcher new words in English and correcting her each time she made a mistake while using this language. These scenarios were

essential for the researcher to gain confidence when communicating in English since they allowed her not to feel afraid of being judged or evaluated because that was one of her mental barriers.

However, inadvertently the terms she was adapting into her English vocabulary were informal, which required a level of commitment from her to not only learn informal (slangs) but also academic or proper English. As stated by the researcher professor in the following excerpt: *“Ella ya tenía mucho mejor inglés, pero a veces era muy informal, se veía que escribía como hablaba, como pensaba. Yo la corregía mucho en la estructura dependiendo las actividades, le decía habla más académico, más formal” (Int5)*. The fact that her professor had noticed these mistakes allowed the researcher to be aware of these and thus avoid them since depending on the academic training or the environment of each individual, the mistake of writing how to speak can be common due that it is one of the ways the brain processes information.

In addition, each Au pair lives a different experience depending on their objectives; not everyone who applies to these immersion programs has the same English foundations, they do not learn, adapt, or improve in the same way. Some participants are even required not to use English at home or while working with the host children. In the researcher's scenario, she decided to immerse herself fully in the language, so in her first year in the United States, she moved in with an English-speaking family. In order to improve her English and to practice what she was learning in her bachelor's degree program and as advised by her professors, she tried to have as little contact with Spanish speakers as possible. Also, the researcher started her English classes as soon as she could and she even began to participate in non-academic settings such as going to an English-speaking church or studying the Bible in English, which initially had

academic purposes but turned out to be an essential part of the life and being of the researcher, since through English she was able to learn other things.

Besides, notable signs of the researcher's English language acquisition and progress while in her first year of experience abroad were noticed by her professors and classmates from the bachelor in the following excerpt is found that:

El último fue en el primer semestre del 2020 con el curso Advanced English 2, y en ese curso ya ella estaba volando y ya estaba mucho más confiada (...) y en literatura 1 que ya requiere un nivel, ella me mostró que sí podía, el nivel de inglés es más alto, de la forma en que yo les exijo en términos de pensamiento crítico, en temas de argumentación, de opinar, de estructurar ideas, de establecer una oposición. (Int 5)

For the researcher, one of the causes of this improvement was that continuing with her distance degree while in the United States, it allows her to apply what she was learning in the distance program in her real life and vice versa, since the improvement was reflected not only in her English skills but in the grades she received later in her undergraduate subjects “*Yo sentí que para ella [pre-service teacher] también fue más fácil, porque como ella estaba interactuando con el idioma, entonces para ella fue mucho más fácil (Int5)*”. In addition, her improvement in the English language allowed other undergraduate students to have her as a model for the activities and she even became support for them, since it was easier for her to identify the common mistakes that her classmates were making with the language and thus give them suggestions that lead them to improve.

Moreover, after a year, the researcher's English skills were quite extended, and in comments given by her employer or Host Mom [HM], it is highlighted how she had a good level

of English and how, although it was already good, she continued to improve *"Dayana's English skills are great. I already thought it was very good when she first came here. She's also improved (...) from communication-wise, we have absolutely no problem. Even just her use of vocabulary, it has evolved a bit, she seems very fluent."* (Int 1) In addition, the previous excerpt shows that learning a language is a continuous process, there is always something to learn and a way to improve.

The HM also highlights that the appropriate use of the researcher's English skills and confidence allowed her to communicate well with the children, which was a requirement for her au pair job. Additionally, the researcher's English skills allowed her to teach the children different ways to react, communicate and solve conflicts faced in everyday environments. Besides, the researcher unconsciously in her interaction and open communication with the children was helping them to develop critical thinking (CT) and soft skills, which is a primal skill for language and literacy success, as it is stated below:

She [myself] is always actively communicating with the kids. Therefore, whenever they don't understand something [the children] or they don't listen, she explains to them why something is very important, because she's giving them context as opposed to just saying, you got to listen to me. Besides, I think that's very educational for them. (Int.1)

Critical thinking in children is developed during their conversations with the adults in their lives. In addition, soft skills according to Medvedeva and Rubtsova (2021) are a "set of supra-professional skills and personal qualities that contribute to a person's successful interaction in society, effective implementation of hard skills, and achieving success in activities" (p.4). Thus, the fact that the researcher was actively communicating and giving context to the children was beneficial for her professionally since it required the application of complex language,

different understanding perspectives, creating creative solutions, and encouraging their opinions and feelings. The application of CT combined with English language in academic and non-academic settings, helped her become a better communicator, as stated by one of her professors *“El hecho de haber mejorado en inglés la hace una mejor narradora ya que relata con mayor claridad y seguridad sus experiencias” (Int2)*. The outcome of this also leads her to grow as a researcher, decision-maker, and to develop interpersonal. Finally, in this journey abroad the researcher experienced multilingual and multicultural events that created in her a broader cultural awareness.

Category 2. Cultural and intercultural aspects that underpin the learning process of a language.

The Cultural and intercultural aspects that underpin the learning process of a language category, seeks to analyze the relationship between English language acquisition and the culture of the language. The researcher's cultural sensitivity began while learning English in Colombia, but it was expanded through an experience abroad. Moreover, it is intended to portray events that created curiosity and interest towards other languages and cultures and the differences between learning English in Colombia and abroad in cultural terms.

Subcategory 1. Learning English in Colombia vs. Learning English abroad in terms of cultural aspects

Recognizing that not all language acquisition processes are the same, at the beginning for the researcher, there was seldom consciousness about the importance of learning English. Sometimes the language seemed like a simple code used to transmit a meaningless message and oblivious cultural aspects. The researcher's first encounters with the English language in

Colombia were monotonous spaces used to acquire a qualification and perhaps learn to use the Spanish-English dictionary. However, her approach towards English began to change the day she had an intercultural encounter with foreign people whose native language was not Spanish and whose only way to communicate was English. These encounters occurred when the researcher was in High School.

According to an excerpt from the biography, *"When I was studying in a rural public school in my hometown Ubate, name (Bruselas) (...) there were several foreign students-teachers that wanted to give their English knowledge to impact the lives of vulnerable populations and learn about Colombian culture"*. At that time, the desire of these foreigners to teach and positively impact the future of others created an interest in the researcher to learn the language, which should not be tedious but valuable with the appropriate didactic. In addition, it awoke in her respect and love towards her own culture and the culture of other countries.

Likewise, for the researcher, this socio-cultural environment allowed her to become familiar with the English language. However, in Colombia, not all schools, or at least not public schools, have some intercultural spaces that allow students to interact with diverse cultures and languages. Therefore, English teachers must bring cultures to the classrooms through their didactics, but not all language teachers in vulnerable or rural areas of Colombia are qualified to teach English, this language is taught only in secondary schools but not in primary schools when referring to official institutions. Because of this, it is common to see the frustration in students who claim that the only thing learned in English classes is the verb To Be, or at least it was what happened in the researcher's High School years. For example, *"When I graduated from high school, there were only a few things I knew in English (...) because a Bulgarian exchange teacher taught me when I was in nine grade"* (Biography). Nowadays, since schools are

changing there is a need to prepare more teachers to work with students whose race, culture, socioeconomic backgrounds are different from the pre-service teachers and mentors responsible for the education of students in the schools (Lambeth & Smith, 2016).

However, the researcher was not only attracted to learn about foreign cultures but also by the ethnic and religious diversity that exists in Colombia, which was pointed out by one of her classmates of the bachelor in English.

Cuando empecé la licenciatura en inglés en la Universidad Santo Tomás conocí a Dayana en Bogotá; Y veíamos inglés (...) para ese entonces yo era religiosa. Entonces iba a la universidad con hábito y era de pronto como curioso que una hermana estuviera estudiando, entonces a varios compañeros se les hacía como llamativo entre ellos Dayana. (Int.3)

Despite that in her first semesters at the Santo Tomás University, the researcher did not practice any religious beliefs, her desire to learn about other cultures and also to help different communities led her to participate in spaces offered by the University, such as mission trips where she was able to learn more about the Colombian ethnic diversity, for example,

I had the opportunity of participating in a Mission trip with members of the DUAD (Bogota, Cucuta, Bucaramanga, and Barrancabermeja) to Mayapo, la Guajira for Christmas week where we served, taught, worked, and stay with a Wayuu native community. There I confirmed what makes me alive (Love, respect, and helping others). (Autobiography)

Likewise, in this Mission Trip, the researcher noticed the same amazement and curiosity that she felt when surrounded by speakers of other languages, the children of these communities felt when interacting with Spanish speakers. Thus, this influenced the researcher since she did not understand how not all children speak Spanish in Colombia or had access to other foreign languages, but only native languages. The previous statement does not mean that the researcher does not consider it essential to protect native languages, but she considered it necessary to develop academic environments where children could learn other languages such as Spanish and English, which are helpful if they ever want or have the opportunity of travelling out of their communities. In addition, she was concerned that because of the abandonment situation and vulnerability of these communities, many of the children and elders had never heard the word Bogota and had not travelled out or had any aspiration of traveling beyond their community.

From that moment on, the researcher understood the importance of learning more about other cultures and leaving the comfort zone since she did not aspire to travel abroad like many people from those communities. Furthermore, the researcher decided to look for environments where she could expand her knowledge about multiculturalism and continue improving her linguistic skills because the University's academic load required a higher English level. Thus, she participated in environments such as

Several English courses and attending English conversational clubs around Bogota (in coffee shops or pubs like "Gringo Tuesday", where foreigners meet to teach, and practice languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, Italian, Korean, Chinese and share their cultures. (Biography)

Despite the researcher's opportunity to participate in these multilingual and multicultural environments, she felt the need to be more exposed because she did not acquire the English level that she needed to meet her academic and professional goals in Colombia. Thus, as it was already stated in the previous category, she decided to participate in an intercultural exchange program, "Au Pair," in the United States, where she was exposed to more multicultural environments every day. The researcher's first multilingual, multicultural experience in the United States was when she arrived in New York, as narrated below:

My first week in the USA was in New York in October 2018, where I took an Au pair training course with 200 girls and one boy from all over the world, South Africa, Japan, China, Colombia, Argentina, Thailand, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Italy, France, Germany... different backgrounds with similar goals improve the English language and cultural awareness. It was exciting but it was also difficult, because of the challenge of needing the English to go through immigration, to claim the luggage, taking the shuttle to the hotel, plus sharing rooms with girls who didn't speak Spanish [in my case] my roommates were from Brazil and Germany.

(Biography)

Likewise, since all these experiences were something new for the researcher they were meaningful learning events. During this time in New York, she learned about The US rules, what to do in case of an emergency, and even CPR lessons, but also aspects related to the customs, most traditional food, and the languages of most Au pairs in the same training process. However, when she faced particular cultural and linguistic challenges, she realized that despite that in academic subjects from the Bachelor in English such as "cultural awareness" and others, she had studied

how to engage and interact in these intercultural environments, somehow the theory was short compared to the need while in practice. The previous statement was also perceived by one of her classmates from the Bachelor in English, for example,

Creo que el currículo de la licenciatura es bastante interesante. En la parte lingüística y en la parte investigativa. Sin embargo, en la parte socio lingüística, aunque tenemos muchas materias y un gran estudio (...) faltaría un poco más de preparación, siento que se queda mucho en la parte teórica y quizás muchos de los estudiantes que pasamos por la licenciatura y que tenemos esos intercambios culturales no son propiciados por la universidad, sino por experiencias (...) en la vida de cada uno. De hecho, hay personas que terminan la licenciatura y no tienen de pronto esa oportunidad porque depende mucho del contexto. (Int3)

On the other hand, since this intercultural experience " Au pair" had the particularity of working and living with a host family, each day was a challenge; such as adapting to a new language and culture, living with a stranger, being far from home, work on assertive communication, to accept and to learn from different parenting models, learning how to drive, to respect the traffic signs to understand the ideals, and even eating habits that vary from state to state. Besides, as stated by Bustamante (2018) "people's behavior differs depending on whether they live in the north or the south part of the country and many other regions have their differences" (p.54) For example:

In my first year as an Au pair, I [myself] lived with a conserved American Family in Florida when I was exposed to English all the time. In contrast, in my second year, I lived with a more liberal family in California, their background

was from Korea and Belgium, and so I was exposed to French, Korean, and English every day. (Biography)

Despite the cultural and linguistic differences, the researcher's first experience in Sarasota, Florida helped her to build the necessary skills she needed to meet the requirements and adapt for her second experience in San Francisco, California [CA] as it was stated by her Host mom "I really liked that Dayana had already experienced working in the US for a family of three girls (...) she had a good experience (...) so we decided to give this a try" (Int 1). Also, the opportunity of living in the multilingual environment while she was an au pair in CA for over two years, was a unique of her Au pair experience because of the characteristic of the host family as sustained by her host mom in the following excerpt.

We are a multi-cultural, multi-language family, and my husband is Belgian, he speaks English and French. I do not speak French; I speak English and Korean. And we wanted to make sure our kids speak all three languages, English, Korean, and French. And so we try to do that at home. Therefore, I speak to them in Korean. My husband speaks to them in French. Also, as parents we are very clear on what we communicate to our children and sort of our expectations, philosophies we have or how we want to raise kids" (Int 1)

Although the previous was a challenge for the researcher, the benefits that the experience brought to her were more significant since she understood the process of learning different languages naturally and spontaneously and the method of language transmission of English, Korean and French. Likewise, the researcher learned how it is possible to learn other foreign languages through English. Despite, there are myths of how learning several languages simultaneously can create confusion and problems adapting to different academic, personal, and interpersonal environments, it is not reflected in the children or people going through this

learning process. Thus, this interaction between languages is also known as translanguaging, according to Wei and García (2016) “translanguaging is the practice where two or more languages are used in a dynamic and functional way to organize and mediate mental processes of understanding, speaking, literacy and learning” (p.8)

Moreover, this experience allowed the researcher to feel curious about learning other languages and how unconsciously the environment has allowed her to learn words and phrases in these languages that she had no interest in learning in the past and applying them with her friends. For the researcher, her desire to learn and improve her English has led her to be aware of other languages and cultures and learn from them as well. The researcher has learned about the benefits that multilingual families experience by continuing to teach their mother and father languages in their homes, such as communication and interaction between children and relatives or friends who do not speak or read English. She also saw that many times the message between children and others is understood even when there is no complete comprehension of the vocabulary in these languages.

Likewise, of the challenges, when the children start attending school even when it is a French school, it becomes difficult for parents to keep up the language exposure they have with the country's predominant language, "English," with the ones they learned at home, such as French and Korean talking about her specific experience. However, from other households around her, she could see similar environments with languages, such as Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, since her neighborhood was diverse, as sustained below:

One of the things I love about this neighborhood in particular [the one I lived for over two years], which is Wylder-Orinda California is the diversity. It's absolutely diverse. And I don't just mean ethnicity and culture, but also just age and background, et cetera

(...) there are so many Au pairs from different countries that we interact all the time. (Interview 1)

Furthermore, raising children multilingual requires extra time and effort for parents and people around to avoid the use of English at home, more because in The US standardized tests dominate the curriculum, so the instruction and first language literacy is discouraged and undervalued (Wei and García, 2016). Besides, it can create a communication barrier within the household since not both parents speak the three languages [talking about the family the researcher was part of] because whenever the kids have a conversation with either of their parents in their mother tongue, the other parent may feel excluded from the conversation. The previous statement, was one of the challenges for the researcher when she was adapting to this multilingual environment, and not every au pair in this intercultural experience agrees with living with a family whose predominant language at home is not English, since the goal is learning English.

Besides, the researcher's interest in languages and awareness of them allowed her to adapt and seek different strategies to continue her learning process of English and the languages to which she was exposed, such as:

In California, I attended an Australian Church for a year, where I was exposed for the first time to a different English accent (perhaps I was exposed before but just then I could recognize the difference). I also went to an English college, and I studied English with people from different cultural backgrounds such as Egypt, Israel, France, Korea, Russia, Germany, Brazil(...), all pursuing the same goal "Become a Proficient English Speakers" [Through the pandemic in 2020-2021 the classes continued by zoom] (Biography)

Another aspect that stood out in the researcher's abroad experience is that living in a multicultural atmosphere helped her to create a more profound sense of belonging for her culture and respect towards others. Although there were only a few Colombians in her environment while in California, she did not experience cultural racism, which unfortunately is common in some states of the United States and the world. Suffering cultural racism was an aspect that concerned the researcher and was also a constant worry for her Host Family, as mentioned below:

When I [HM] was deciding where to live and raise my kids,(...) a [multicultural neighborhood] was important because I think one of the challenging things friends who were Korean- American or ex American (basically their parents came from somewhere else) ethnically they don't look the same, so it was challenging for them growing up, facing (...) discrimination (...) recently hate crimes against Asians [Because of COVID-19], it's incredibly sad because the U.S is the country where they grew up, this is the only country they know as home, yet to be ostracized and to be tried as outsiders in their own home country,(...) for my kids they are Americans. I don't want them ever feeling that way, (...) It is still going to be hard because they are still going to be a minority, but when they grow in a culturally diverse and inclusive community like Wylder CA, (...), that will be less of a problem. I don't want feeling like a minority or outsider to be part of their growing identity (...)

Finally, despite the extensive diversity in the United States, there are significant and similar academic aspects that created a different mindset and habits in the researcher, such as reading. The researcher before moving to the United States did not have a reading habit or she only used to read in academic contexts, but even then, she struggled while reading in either

English or Spanish. However, in The US it exists a reading culture that most families implement in their households since the children are newborns and even before. This particularity was also perceived by one of the researcher classmates from the bachelor in English, who also participated in the au pair program, as she stated below:

Una cosa que me impactó mucho fue (...) la parte de la lectura (...) a ellos les encantaba leer (...) yo creo que todo está como en los hábitos que ellos tienen como cultura, así como digamos en Colombia, lastimosamente un hábito es que la gente se siente a ver novelas en las noches. Para ellos [American culture] un hábito es que los papás en las noches antes de que los niños se acuesten a dormir, les leen un libro, les empiezan a contar historias (...) porque en el colegio pues también les ponen ciertos libros de lectura, así como acá [Colombia]. Pero la diferencia es que allá [The US] si les gustaba leer y les quedaba fácil" (Int 4)

This process of awareness and interest towards reading began in the researcher when as Au Pair in the US, it was part of her exchange duties to read to the Host children she took care of every night. The researcher's responsibilities were also to take them to libraries where she could read about different topics. Despite the children's young age (between one and seven years old), they enjoyed it, and it was even one of their favorite times of the day. Despite that in the curriculum of Colombia, there are established academic spaces where it is demanded and encouraged reading, because of the lack of reading habits in many Colombian households, and the assumption that fostering reading is the school's responsibility, there are few people who read or find it enjoyable. The researcher plans to apply this awareness and passion for reading in the professional field and the future, perhaps in her role as a mother. The change in her mentality

was beneficial for her as an English learner, and it was also perceived by one of her bachelor's professors, for example:

(...)Un cambio importante que se refleja en ella, porque yo siento que ella no tenía un hábito desarrollado de la lectura, de la escritura. Le costaba, pero yo siento que en un principio le costaba por el idioma, una vez ya apropiado el idioma, sintió mayor confianza para hacerlo. (Int2)

Indeed, good reading habits have led the researcher to develop her English language skills, understand, and learn more about the multiculturalism around her daily. Likewise, these skills have been crucial for her professional, and personal development.

Category 3. Constructing personal and professional identity while learning English

This category seeks to analyze how in the researcher's search for meeting her academic and linguistic goals, there were some events that influenced her life personally and professionally. Likewise, it seeks to discover the aspects that transformed her mentality, her identity, and the influence of each environment in which she lived.

Subcategory 1. Aspects related to personal and professional development.

Beyond what has been discussed in other categories about English proficiency and cultural awareness, the researcher demonstrated that her desire of improving her professional, and personal competencies motivated her to overcome the challenges and difficulties she had experienced throughout her life. Since from her early years of life, the lack of resources caused her to be in a position of social, personal, and academic vulnerability. Perhaps if the researcher had only focused on that scarcity scenario, she might never have achieved particular goals such

as graduating from High School, learning English, traveling and studying abroad, and completing her Bachelor's degree in English.

Despite that, the researcher was remarked by high school professors that she was too bad at English and her necessity to take a sabbatical because she did not have the resources to apply to an university as was stated in the second category, it was her mom's support and the researcher's desire of becoming a proficient English speaker what helped her to unconsciously cultivate resilience. According to American Psychological Association (2012), “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress; such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors” (para 4). In addition, resilience has given the researcher the strength to overcome the challenges faced while achieving her personal and professional goals.

The previous researcher's characteristic was highlighted by two of her professors from the bachelor's in English. One of them stated that the researcher; *“Es una docente en formación que siempre se ha mostrado como una persona que quiere salir adelante, que quiere superar las dificultades, que igual las expresa y que también quería estar buscando apoyo”* (Int 2). In addition, the second professor stated:

Otros rasgos personales o del comportamiento de ella que resaltaría es la resiliencia (...) porque a ella [the researcher] no la vi rendirse, digamos, es una persona que a pesar de las dificultades, seguía intentando (...) y seguía haciendo (...) eso es algo que yo aprecio mucho en un estudiante (...) porque a pesar de las dificultades no se rindió, sino que siempre lo siguió intentando. (Int.5)

The researcher's resilience helped her to be empathic with the people in her environment who have faced episodes similar to the ones she had experienced. Although the researcher did not give up, while in Colombia, and in the USA, there were times when she felt like giving up, when facing the language barrier, the cultural shock, homesickness, negative thoughts, lack of faith, health problems, or falling into episodes of anxiety and depression, created by being away from her family in traumatic episodes, such as losing her dad, and the uncertainty and fear that the world experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between (2020- 2022).

However, resilience is an ability learned and developed from the difficult experiences in our lives, and a lack of resilience can turn lives into unhealthy ones. These difficult events also worked as fuel and filled the researcher with resistance and hope, which later brought a positive outcome as she stated:

The highs lead me to keep dreaming big, feel grateful, increase my positivity, trust the process, and believe in myself, and the lows lead me to be brave, faithful, courageous, and more sensible to the needs others might face. Sometimes we have to touch the ground to rise up, (...) and grow. (Autobiography)

On the other hand, to achieve personal and professional goals, it is not only needed to be resilient, but also to be determined, constant, and self-regulated, and even more as a student of a distance learning modality, since the results received differ from there. In the case of the researcher, her initial learning model was perhaps transcribing books and everything she wanted to learn, as one of her professors from the bachelor repeatedly pointed out, "*ella escribía todo, anotaba todo, casi que transcribió libros (...) creo que eso le permitió a ella saltar y hacer ese progreso (Int5)*"; But each individual has their learning model, so to get the learning results expected, it is required to discover and apply the learning method that works more efficiently for

each one. However, as student seeking English proficiency in this distance modality it is required, dedication and perseverance to not quit the process. Also, the essence of a student, mainly in distance learning, is based on reaching precise self-schooling to succeed pedagogically under international standards (Rueda, 2020). The previous statement was also highlighted by one of the researcher's classmates:

Lo que pasa es que en un sistema a distancia que se fue convirtiendo en virtual por temas de la pandemia [Covid19] se requiere un nivel de autorregulación bastante alto (..) como estudiante virtual te tienes que sentar y tienes que si o si esforzarte por lograrlo, porque solo con las clases y lo que está ahí pues no lo vas a hacer, requiere un esfuerzo grande por parte de la persona, más si uno es alguien que trabaja y estudia al mismo tiempo (Int.3).

For the researcher in order to succeed while pursuing a bachelor's degree and being a distance education student, the accompaniment and support of professors and classmates were essential as she stated:

When decided to continue the University, there were days where I felt overwhelmed and incapable of continuing with the program, with the University, (...) I am so glad that in that season I had professors, classmates and family members that were motivating me and supporting me. It definitely helped me to go through and to manage my time better between school, work, University, and exploring the new culture while in the US.

(Autobiography)

Moreover, as seen above, other skills that evolved in the researcher's identity while pursuing her personal and professional goals were the soft skills. These skills are composed of

time management, motivation, teamwork, adaptability, compromise, creativity and critical thinking, dependability, problem-solving, communication, negotiation (Doyle, 2022). These are skills that are most learned through life experiences and usually are hard to learn in traditional learning environments; also these skills are necessary to succeed in professional environments. According to Rockwood (2021)

“Soft skills are behaviors, personality traits and work habits (...) that help people prosper at work. For example, a talented graphic designer might wow [surprise] people with her creations, but if she constantly misses deadlines or doesn't listen to feedback (...) her career might stall” (para.1).

Unfortunately, many professionals and learners who are not open to feedback or coaching get stuck and do not have the opportunity to emerge and expand professionally. On the contrary, adapting and understanding the importance of these skills allowed the researcher to improve significantly professionally and personally, as was highlighted by one of her professors:

Ella tenía una actitud respetuosa frente al recibir el feedback, (...) otros estudiantes se molestan o se sienten mal. Ella lo tomaba con buena actitud y lo tomaba por el lado positivo. La retroalimentación siempre es constructiva, pero la recepción no siempre lo es (...) ella lo recibía y en vez de llevarla hacia atrás, como a asustarse, como lo hago mal o algo así. Al contrario, ella seguía intentando. (int5)

Likewise, the researcher could also experience the previous statement in her English practicum while teaching since the students that showed better results were the ones that constantly requested help, clarification and applied the given feedback in their assignments, which is essential in academic and professional environments. In addition, as stated by one of her

professors above, feedback is always constructive even if the person receiving them does not perceive it that way. Still, something that also helped her accept feedback as a student and in the practicum setting was the compromise of her past professors while giving her the feedback; it allowed her to visualize that applying these tools works beyond academic. Still, in everyday environments, the previous was identified in the researcher by her professor: *“Yo siento que ella desarrolla mayor compromiso, porque ella percibe el compromiso del docente, ya que siente que la retroalimentación no iba solamente por la tarea, sino la retroalimentación la llamaba a una reflexión de avance en su crecimiento profesional”* (int2).

In addition, the researcher’s practicum experience allowed her to combine soft skills, linguistic skills, and the pedagogical knowledge, learned through her bachelor's in English. Also, the researcher's mindset was changed from collecting knowledge for herself to finding ways to help her students learn the English language while promoting a broad perspective. Besides, the characteristics of the population who she had the opportunity to teach were students of a non-profit organization that promotes affordable and accessible education by making agreements with higher education institutions, and supporting communities that seek personal and professional growth, which aligned with the researcher values and vocation, as stated below:

"I did my practicum (Pedagogical practice I & II) at Fundacion Alianza Social Educativa Bogotá “ASE” by zoom (because of Covid-19) as a requirement for my B.A. in English, I had to teach English two groups of 16-17 years old students from B1 & A1 levels. The experience was one of the most significant (...), because it was my first time teaching, applying all the pedagogical settings learned through my career. I had the opportunity to guide and evaluate them, to plan for the first time a syllabus, lesson plans, while creating

my own resources using recordings and videos, which I had collected during my time in the US." (Biography)

Moreover, the researcher's process of adaptability and her positive mindset was other aspects highlighted by people around her. Despite that, her living atmosphere constantly changed from moving to a small town (Ubaté) to a big city (Bogotá). From Colombia to the United States, from a Host family in Florida to another completely different in California, she often saw the positive and the learning opportunities in these than only focusing on the stressors and factors that this contained. Besides, these events empowered the researcher since she became more secure, confident of her skills, of who she was, more organized, goal-oriented, independent, and multitask. Besides, the researcher became aware of her development in her emotional intelligence which is closed related to the development of soft skills (aHuda, Suyanto, Arifi, Putranta, & Azizah, 2021). The previous was supported by her professor from the Bachelor in English, who followed her process for a couple of years:

"Para mí fue como muy grato ver ese proceso, en un periodo de alrededor de dos años en que ella saltó de ser una persona tímida, un poco retraída, con mucha ansiedad, donde yo sentía que ya estaba temblando, casi llorando y era una persona muy insegura y verla completamente tranquila. Por ejemplo, un día que estaba en tutoría y estaba conduciendo (...) para mí ver esos cambios de vida era , muy significativo (...) la experiencia con ella en el proceso desde que la tuve la primera vez 2018 hasta allá en el espacio en el primer semestre del 2020." (Int.5)

On the other hand, saying that everything the researcher achieved and learned was in her strength steals the credit from the principal author of her story, God. When the researcher was in Colombia, she knew certain Catholic principles because of her family background and the values

of the Santo Tomás University: *"Love of truth, excellence, and effort, fraternity and solidarity, respect and culture\social inclusion, critical thinking"* (Autobiography). Although the researcher thought she knew about God, she did not have an intimate relationship with him.

In 2019, months after she immigrated to the United States, she began to assemble in an English-speaking Christian church in Sarasota, Florida, called Bayside Church. The researcher started attending the church to practice her English and interact with others, especially English speakers. Because in the United States, one of the most extensive religions is Christianity [Protestants], it allowed her to connect joyfully with God through prayer, praise, reading of the bible, and worship beyond only repeating religious rituals. However, the plan of God was more significant than what she expected because God transformed her life and identity. She discovered that her life had a purpose and that her desire to help and serve others was always in her heart for a reason because God put it there.

Nowadays, the researcher believes that God has a greater purpose for everyone and that her calling is to share the gospel of love and the new life that Jesus Christ offers. Also, she believes that God healed her wounds and helped her overcome those episodes of loneliness, depression, and anxiety she experienced through her life and that the same God that healed her can heal others. Likewise, the researcher bases her way of living and interacting with the people following the example of Jesus Christ, loving, being kind, respecting, and serving others, which her host mom highlighted:

When I think about Dayana, I think of a woman of faith because I know Christianity religion is very important to her, and so she practices that a lot. I appreciate that because we are not a religious family, she's not preaching to us about it. However, I think all the aspects that I appreciate and respect of Christianity, being loving and kind to everybody,

the volunteerism service aspect, and Dayana practices that a lot. In addition, I think Dayana is just a very positive, and calm person. (Int.1)

Despite that, the researcher's passion is to share with everyone the love and truth of Jesus Christ, she understands that not everyone believes the same, and because there is an extended list of beliefs and religions, she has learned to share, respect and love others even with the differences, which is a result from being exposed to a lot of beliefs, unbelief doctrines, and cultures while living in the US.

Finally, the researcher understood that every aspect of her life happened for a reason, and the combination of the challenges and opportunities that she experienced are the pillars of who she is nowadays and who she becoming, as she stated:

“Being surrounded by incredible professors, people of faith, travelers, CEOs had inspired me with their testimonies (...) The Bachelor in English from Santo Tomas University helped me building strong linguistic, pedagogical and research bases; the exchange program strengthened my social linguistic skills and cultural awareness (...) Despite the uncertainty of the future I know that to contribute to a better world I need to start for helping my country” (Autobiography).

Therefore, the experiences and aspects analyzed in the categories highlighted the characteristics of a teacher's identity, built through her personal and professional training, transforming how she perceives herself and how others perceive her, which is part of a continuous interaction process. Likewise, while she was searching to improve her teaching, linguistic skills, and pedagogical skills, the development of socio-cultural skills occurred marked by the different scenarios of cultural diversity.

6. Conclusions

This narrative focused on answering the research question How does an English pre-service teacher achieve English proficiency while studying a Distance Bachelor's Degree and living in the USA?; the key concepts studied were narrative inquiry, life experiences of English pre-service teachers, autobiographical research, intercultural learning, and distance education were studied. In addition, there were analyzed three categories, achieving English proficiency, cultural and intercultural aspects that underpin the learning process of a language, constructing personal and professional identity while learning English. Through this process, it was established that intercultural experiences are significant while developing a pre-service teacher's identity because it potentiates professional, personal, cultural, pedagogical, research, and linguistic skills.

Besides, students and pre-service teachers exposed to different intercultural contexts got a broader perspective towards other cultures and languages. For example, through the experience, Au pair was noticed that some participants, including the researcher, were immersed in multilingual and multicultural environments. Because of this, their level of cultural and language awareness increased, and learned other skills. On the contrary, there are participants of these exchange programs pre-service teachers and non-pre-service teachers who during their pursuit of English proficiency reject these multilingual and multicultural environments since they fear not achieving their linguistic goals in that language if they interact or are engaged with other languages.

In addition, the English Language and the USA culture influenced the pre-service teacher's identity, because knowing a second language transformed her sense of self, her social

environment, and the possibilities for self-representation through language use, and somehow she became more confident while behaving and using her English skills. According to Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, and Brown (2013), "From this perspective, the acquisition of language knowledge and skills remains essential, but it is viewed not as the endpoint of second language learning, but as the starting point for the identity developments that second language learning entails" (p.2). Another aspect found through data analysis is the importance that awareness and development of spiritual or religious life have for a person's identity and the influence that the environment has.

On the other hand, through the development of this narrative, it was possible to reflect on how important it is for pre-service teachers to tell their stories, and their learning processes, since through these some events are analyzed that in other contexts, they may seem unique to the individual and insignificant but that are shared and promote the development of critical thinking and the understanding of personal experiences through narration. Also, through autobiographical narratives, it was possible to understand some education issues while empowering studies for educators, and education (Yung, 2019)

Likewise, the importance of applying narratives in research spaces was observed since not all researchers are in environments that allow them to execute traditional research methods. Thus, from the researcher's perspective, the application of narrative inquiries in the Bachelor of English at Santo Tomas DUAD University, allowed her to opt for the degree alternative of the research project, which was the greatest opportunity for her due to the environment and the personal and professional vision of the researcher about remaining in the US, which permit her to completed her English degree.

In addition, the distance learning modality with a curriculum that adapts to the needs of the students is an essential instrument since it allows several students to access higher education and, at the same time approach other opportunities such as studying in other environments. Thus, the distance learning modality promotes and requires students to develop more soft skills, resilience, discipline, and autonomy than traditional education. Besides, the distance modality allows students to integrate the socio-cultural knowledge learned in foreign environments within the education faculty and influence positively others through teaching.

Nevertheless, theories and assumptions about language learning were clarified during the researcher's experience of learning English in the United States since learners have a perspective that when moving to an English-speaking country, the language will be learned spontaneously. However, it does not work that way; it is required to take English lessons to get the advantage of the opportunities each country offers since English proficiency is linked to higher income and a better standard of living, but surprisingly there is a percentage of people living in the U.S. who do not speak English. Moreover, it can be presumed that every family in the U.S. speaks English at home but a high percentage of people speak a non-English language at home. According to a survey in 2016 21.6% of the U.S. residents of five years old and above spoke a non-English language at home, meaning that 78.4 % spoke only English at home, and the two most popular second languages learned and taught in schools are French and Spanish (Liberty Language Services, 2021)

Although a population of people living in the United States does not speak English, primarily immigrants, they seek ways to break the hegemonic cultural and linguistic barrier, which is experienced in many countries, where to be a member of the society that is included and accepted is required to conform to the statutes imposed by the dominant class or language. This

is done by creating multicultural environments like schools and neighborhoods where some immigrants and non-immigrants in the United States pursue to preserve and interact with non-dominant cultures and languages, which is essential for their identity development. Thus, after being immersed in the US culture for over three years it was recongnized that several languages can be learned simultaneously, and this methodology should be implemented from an early age, it will not genearte confusion or problems adapting to different academic, personal, and interpersonal environments; instead it will bring several benefits.

The previous statements redirect the importance of generating environments in Colombian society and education where non-dominant cultures and languages are preserved. At the same time, foreign cultures and languages are implemented and instructed since all languages should have the opportunity to interact and coexist in symmetry. This is concerning the Bachelor's Degree in English, which in its search for internationalization process, could implement ways to facilitate affordable connections for pre-service teachers with intercultural and interlingual immersion programs; because only on a few occasions do students have these opportunities during their lives or careers, and as stated for the researcher, many times English encounters become monotonous and meaningless; but through this researche it was demonstrated that these oppotunities are necessary to enrich and develop their personal and professional skills and identity.

Moreover, It was discovered a need for generating connections where or to implement in the curriculum subjects where the English pre-service teachers can access standardized language tests such as TOEFL or IELTS earlier during the degree since these tests have become an essential professional instrument over time. The previous could be considered as further studies that involve all the mentioned above. Likewise, it is important to develop environments where

the love of reading is fostered from an early age, also to create more accessible and quality English programs, since in Colombia language learning should not be a privilege of a few and likewise to promote programs of immersion with more regulated policies.

Finally, the limitations found through the development of this study are related to the lack of resources in the field of research that are not implemented within the undergraduate curriculum, which would allow students to optimize time and research processes, such as access to platforms or software essential to optimize the transcription process and data analysis. Likewise, it is necessary that the LLEI promote the development of the investigation of the experiences of the students and teachers of the field to increase intercultural environments. Since through the development of this research project, it was identified that the cultural and intercultural encounters to which students have been exposed are mostly promoted by social projection programs or personal experiences and not by the LLEI.

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Appendixes

Appendix A (Interviews and transcripts)

Interview 1 (Host mom) June 29.2021 (Pages 1-4)
Interview 2 Professor of the bachelor in English July. 01.2021 (Pages 5-9)
Interview 3 to Classmate and student of the LLEI. July.02.2021 (Pages 9-14)
Interview 4 Classmate LLEI and former Au pair in the US June 27.2021. (Pages 14-20)
Interview 5 Professor of the bachelor in English July. 07.2021 (Pages 20-27)
Interview 6 Professor of the bachelor in English (Pages 28-32)

**Appendix B BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF A LIFE EPISODE OF THE ENGLISH
PRE-SERVICE TEACHER LEIDY DAYANA CARDENAS GOMEZ June 2021:
PURSUING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

Appendix C - *Survey Intercultural experience Au Pair in the US. June 2021*

Appendix D : Annotated Bibliography