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Maestría en Ambientes Bilingües de aprendizaje

Narrative Analysis of English Tutoring Sessions in Non-Institutional Online Environments

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We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.



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ABSTRACT

This qualitative narrative study engages in a phenomenological exploration of the way teachers achieve agency in their pedagogical practices within a non-institutional online environment, in light of the experiences and perspectives of five English teachers from diverse nationalities, who have had the opportunity to work with Latin American adult English learners. The primary objective is to propose academic guidelines to transform teaching practices with adults and establish the attributes of non-institutional online environments to characterize this type of virtual spaces as there is not much-updated data in the literature. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and narrative frames to collect data. The narrative analysis involved using thematic analysis for multiple case studies, which categorizes, codes sample excerpts, and organizes them in thematic headings. The results showed that teachers achieve agency through their beliefs, aspirations, actions, and decisions oriented to meet students' needs. It also revealed the most prominent attributes of non-institutional online learning spaces in terms of flexibility, personalized teaching, barriers, and digital tools.

Key words: Ecological Approach, Teacher Agency, Non-institutional Learning Environments, Pedagogical Practices, Narrative Analysis

RESUMEN

Este estudio cualitativo narrativo realiza una exploración fenomenológica de la forma en que los profesores logran la agencialidad en sus prácticas pedagógicas dentro de un entorno en línea no institucional, a la luz de las experiencias y perspectivas de cinco profesores de inglés de diversas nacionalidades, que han tenido la oportunidad de trabajar con estudiantes de inglés adultos latinoamericanos. El objetivo primordial es proponer lineamientos académicos para transformar las prácticas de enseñanza con adultos y establecer los atributos de los ambientes en línea no institucionales para caracterizar este tipo de espacios virtuales, ya que no existen muchos datos actualizados en la literatura. Los investigadores realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas y marcos narrativos para recolectar los datos. El análisis narrativo consistió en utilizar el análisis temático para múltiples estudios de caso, que categoriza, codifica extractos de muestras y los organiza en subcategorías temáticas. Los resultados mostraron que los profesores logran la agencialidad a través de sus creencias, aspiraciones, acciones y decisiones orientadas a satisfacer las necesidades de los alumnos. También reveló los atributos más destacados de los espacios de aprendizaje en línea no institucionales en términos de flexibilidad, enseñanza personalizada, barreras y herramientas digitales.

Palabras claves: Enfoque ecológico, Agencialidad Docente, Entornos de Aprendizaje no Institucionales, Prácticas pedagógicas, Análisis narrativo



INTRODUCTION

"Both the individual and the group immersed in a learning organization and society struggle with the dilemma of establishing change in the learners' lives as well as their own" Fullan (1972).

In our current era, characterized by unprecedented technological advancements and global interconnectedness, the landscape of English language instruction has undergone a remarkable transformation. A 2015 report from the British Council highlighted a growing trend among teenagers and adults enrolling in private English lessons, marking a departure from traditional classroom settings. Instead, a burgeoning phenomenon of non-institutional online English lessons has emerged, offering learners and instructors unprecedented opportunities for engagement and pedagogical exploration. This shift is further underscored by the increased prominence of English private tutoring (EPT) as a vital out-of-class learning activity, a trend that gained even greater momentum during the pandemic when educators worldwide rapidly transitioned from face-to-face to virtual instruction (Rao, 2020).

In the midst of this digital paradigm shift, there arises an imperative need to examine the pivotal role played by teachers in shaping the contours of online language education. This examination is particularly pertinent within the distinctive context of Latinoamérica. Online learning, characterized as a form of distance education, has emerged as the predominant sector of distance learning in recent years (Bartley & Golek, 2004; Evans & Haase, 2001).

Motivating this research was the glaring scarcity of information and research dedicated to Non-Institutional Online English Tutoring in the existing literature. While digital teaching and learning experiences have garnered increased attention, as seen in educational journals such as the "Journal of Online Learning and Teaching" (JOLT) and international organizations like the International Society for Teaching in Education (ISTE) and the Learning Consortium (OLC), the

majority of available literature remains rooted in formal teaching affiliated to an educational institution and having a pre-established curriculum-based learning, as evidenced on platforms like Redalyc, Scielo, Profile, Dialnet, Springer Link, Google Scholar, JURN, ERIC, Jestor, and CRAI. Consequently, despite the growing prominence of online language instruction, a significant gap persisted in our understanding of how teachers navigate the complexities of language teaching in these non-traditional and "non-institutional" settings.

This research addresses this conspicuous gap by exploring deeper into the experiences and pedagogical practices of teachers who have worked in non-institutional online English classes. It specifically focuses on how teachers achieve agency in their pedagogical practices within this unique educational context.

Through this comprehensive exploration, we aim to offer a nuanced understanding of how instructors exercise agency, a concept encompassing “situations where teachers capacity to exercise discretion and judgment in adapting their instruction and curriculum to meet the diverse and changing needs of their students” (Zeichner, 2019, p. 6). Agency, in this context, is the ability or potential to act and it is achieved within a framework influenced by individual, structural, cultural, relational, and social factors (Espeland et al., 2021).

The ecological approach underscores the significance of teachers' values, ideas, and beliefs as crucial cultural and personal aspects of agency, guiding their actions and aims in teaching (Biesta et al., 2015). Furthermore, teachers, as agents of change, wield substantial influence through their day-to-day instructional choices, shaping the implementation of educational reform and the persistence or change in instructional practices (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015).

This research explores how teachers exercise agency in their online teaching practices, and it provides two important contributions to the literature by proposing academic guidelines that can transform pedagogical practices with adults, and by establishing the attributes of a non-institutional online Bilingual Learning Environment based on narrative analysis.

Research statement

The demand for online English language tutoring presents opportunities to explore teacher agency, which is understood as “situations where teachers have the capacity to exercise their discretion and judgment in adapting their instruction and curriculum to meet the diverse and changing needs of their students” (Zeichner, 2019, p. 6). This exploration is based on the perspectives and experiences of five English teachers. The effectiveness of the online English sessions may rely on the agency of the teachers who facilitate them and the pedagogical practices (Jaime Osorio & Insuasty, 2015; Parra-Bernal et al., 2021; Posada & Patiño, 2007) they employ. Thus, the primary aim of this study is to propose academic guidelines considering teacher agency and their pedagogical practices in non-institutional online English learning contexts to transform teaching practices with adults. This research focuses on the experiences and perspectives of multi-local situated English teachers who meet specific criteria, holding either only a bachelor’s degree or a bachelor’s degree along with postgraduate studies, having up to six months of experience in non-institutional online English teaching, and directly working with Latin American adult students.

This research study belongs to the research line 1: Bilingual Learning Environments (BLE) of the MABA which aims at studying their characteristics and their influence on educational practices. This study analyzed narratively the unexplored attributes of BLE along with the achievement of teacher agency in their pedagogical practices with a non-institutional

online learning environment and proposed teaching guidelines that transform pedagogical practices with adults.

Research question

How do teachers achieve agency in their pedagogical practices within non-institutional online English tutoring sessions with adults?

General Objective

To propose academic guidelines that transform pedagogical practices with multi-local situated participants based on narrative analysis.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the attributes of a non-institutional online learning environment with adults based on seven teachers' perspectives and experiences.
2. To establish the attributes of a non-institutional English language learning environment with adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To epistemologically support this research project, the conceptual framework was delimited with the following categories: non-institutional online learning environments, teacher agency, and pedagogical practices in educational contexts. For its review and analysis, a documentary analysis index was used to delimit the documents in books and research articles, published between 2014 -2022. The documentation was taken from repositories such as Google

Academics, Researchgate, CRAI-USTA, ERIC, Scielo, Redalyc, and Profile. The documentary analysis matrix is referenced as an annex to the research.

Non-institutional Online Learning Environments

Learning environments have been traditionally associated with physical classrooms, rooms with desks and chalkboards, or scheduled lessons on a campus where learning takes place because there is a teacher at the front of a class. However, one accurate definition of a learning environment can be found in the Glossary of Educational Reform. It defines learning environments as the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. This is a preferred alternative to classroom because students may learn in various settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments.

Bates (2019) affirms that there are different types of learning environments ranging from traditional school or college campuses to online courses, military training settings, interpersonal contexts involving friends, family, and workplaces, interactions with nature, and personalized or technology-based learning environments. Additionally, he highlights key components of an effective learning environment. These include the qualities and traits of learners and their inter-communication means, the teaching and learning goals, the supportive activities facilitating learning, the available resources including textbooks, technology, and learning spaces, the assessment methods best suited to measure and drive learning, and the culture that surrounds the learning environment.

Tahir et al., (2018) carried out a literature analysis for the evolution of the learning environment focusing on ubiquitous learning. They found out that the learning environment has progressively evolved in five different stages throughout the last few years due to the rapid

development of technology. It has moved from Traditional Learning to Electronic (e-learning) to Blended learning, then to Mobile learning (m-learning) and now it is moving towards Ubiquitous learning (u-learning).

Traditional is marked by a passive, formal, and direct educational setting in which the teacher assumes the role of an authority figure, the primary communicator, and the exclusive source of knowledge. On the contrary, e-learning involves online instruction via web-based platforms, supporting distance education. In this context, the teacher functions as a tutor, presenter, and information provider. Interaction in e-learning occurs through a designated computer network, enabling educators to engage with learners, who, in turn, provide feedback using the same platform. Blended learning combines the traditional classroom with e-learning, causing the teacher's role to transition into that of a coach, presenter, or assessor. Interaction becomes reciprocal and self-driven, with the educator receiving input from multiple learners simultaneously. Transitioning to Mobile learning (M-learning), learners utilize mobile phones for wireless access to learning materials. Interaction remains self-directed and mutual, providing the benefit of learning at any time and location due to the portability of devices (Tahir et al., 2018). Finally, Ubiquitous Learning (U-learning) introduces an innovative educational environment that integrates both e-learning and M-learning. U-learning occurs at any time and from any location, employing wireless, mobile, and sensor technologies. Interaction becomes multidirectional, emphasizing self-directed, self-motivated, and collaborative learning. In this scenario, the teacher's role expands to that of an expert, planner, and advisor (Tahir et al., 2018).

In other words, ubiquitous learning (U-learning) represents an innovative educational environment that combines both e-learning and M-learning. U-learning takes place at any time and from anywhere, using wireless, mobile, and sensor technologies. Interaction becomes multidirectional, emphasizing self-directed, self-motivated, and collaborative learning. In this scenario, the teacher's role extends to that of an expert, planner, and advisor (Tahir et al., 2018).

Online Learning Environments

The OECD (2017) presents seven principles of learning to design learning environments, and they are based on research reviews written by experts. These principles are proposed for all types of learning settings and schools. They conclude that a learning environment should: have learning and engagement as central, be social as learning depends on the interaction with others, be connected to the learner's emotions, reflect individual differences, be demanding, use assessment strategies and formative feedback, and have interdisciplinary connections among different subjects to respond to real-life situations. Regarding learning and engaging in learning environments, Psoinos (2021) states that during online tutoring sessions the learners are expected to be more active and cooperative than in the physical classroom because the more learners participate, cooperate, and interact with one another and the teacher during the session, the more meaningful and engaging the session gets.

Since there is not much literature directly related to *non-institutional online learning environments*, this term will be defined based on the results of this research study as *a dynamic virtual space where learning occurs because there are some favorable conditions such as flexibility, personalized teaching, and digital tools, with certain barriers, but without direct*

affiliation to any school, university, or educational institution, where teachers can achieve agency through their beliefs, aspirations, and decisions and actions oriented to meet students' needs.

Teacher Agency

Agency is a broad concept that has been discussed by an array of authors in the literature, and it is applied to different academic backgrounds such as anthropology, economics, philosophy, and sociology. However, in this project we intend to go beyond this term to cover a more concrete but also holistic conceptualization called teacher agency. Priestley et al. (2015), for instance, theorized teacher agency based on an *ecological approach*, arguing that it is a situated achievement that results from the interplay of three dimensions: iterational, practical–evaluative and projective.

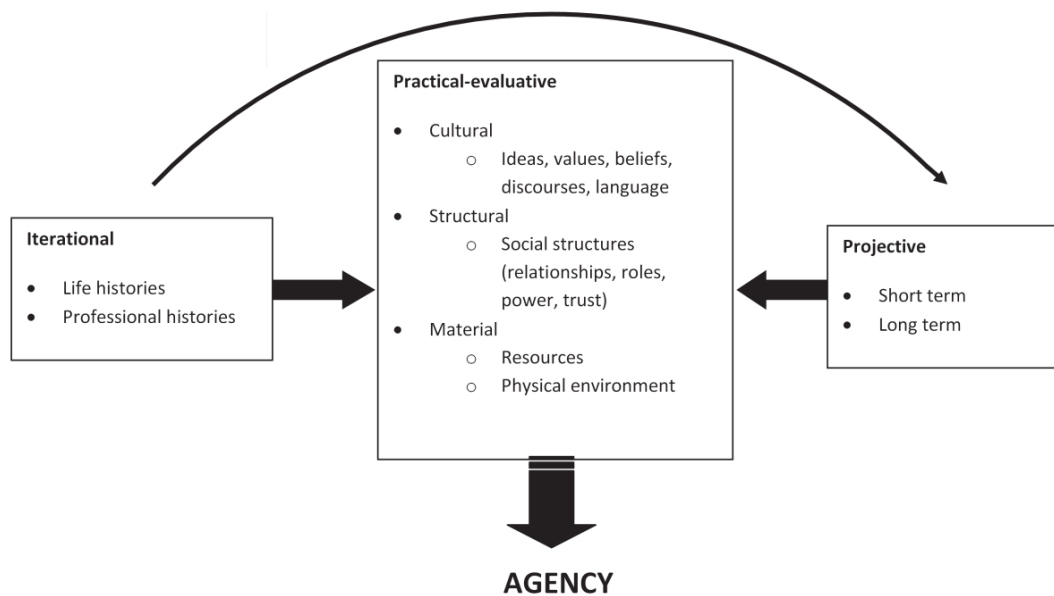
The iterational aspect involves individual capacity like skills and knowledge, and personal/professional beliefs and values shaped by past experiences. The projective dimension focuses on a teacher's positive, long and short-term aspirations rooted in their beliefs, values and prior experiences, prioritizing students' interests. And the practical–evaluative aspect of teacher agency pertains to the daily work environment where teachers navigate challenging decisions, often involving compromises or conflicts with their envisioned goals and aspirations. This aspect involves handling difficult choices within their day-to-day teaching contexts (Priestley et al., 2015).

In addition, Priestley et al. (2015) highlight that agency results from the individual's skills, knowledge, and beliefs, as well as external factors including material resources, cultural

and structural conditions as well as restrictions. From the ecological perspective, the teacher is viewed as a professional who thinks, judges, and acts within environing conditions.

Figure 1

Model to understand the achievement of agency



Note: This figure illustrates the above-mentioned theory about teacher agency by Priestley et al. (2015). Retrieved from their book, *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*, p. 30.

In more contemporary language teaching research, there has been a growing interest in the concept of teacher agency. Other researchers such as Tao & Gao (2021) have contributed to this discourse by offering a broader and holistic definition of agency. In their book entitled *Language Teacher Agency*, these authors start by describing agency based on four conceptualizations derived from social-cognitive, sociocultural, poststructuralist, and ecological perspectives. Later, they discuss a series of professional issues that language teachers need to address when they have to exercise agency. Even though they constantly emphasize that agency is viewed as dynamic intentional acts influenced by socio-cultural factors, as well as the interaction between individuals and context, it is worth analyzing these four points of view.

Firstly, drawing on Badura's (2001) social-cognitive theory, Tao & Gao (2021) indicate that agency involves intentional actions and self-efficacy undertaken by individuals to adapt, develop, and renew in response to evolving times. They also add that human agency is affected by internal personal factors, behavioral patterns and the environment (e.g. relationships).

Secondly, grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, they argue that agentic actions occur in the social, cultural, and historical settings where individuals are located. In addition, it is mentioned that teacher agency takes place on the interpersonal and social levels because individual agency, beliefs, and values are shaped by sociocultural contexts. Within these sociocultural settings, teacher agency is mediated by tools such as language, technology, curriculum, assessment practices, and educational policies, as well as by interactions with stakeholders (Tao & Gao, 2021; Wertsch et al. 1993).

Thirdly, taking a post-structuralist perspective, agency is enacted through a discursive practice, and individuals make agentic actions when they speak for themselves from their positions. For instance, a language teacher can agentively use plurilingualism discourses to build a plurilingual speaker identity (Tao & Gao, 2021; Davies & Harré, 1999; Davies, 1990).

Fourthly, based on the ecological perspective by Priestly et al. (2012) and Eteläpelto et al. (2013), Tao & Gao (2021) address agency as a phenomenon, or something that is achieved. In contrast to the sociocultural viewpoint, these authors affirm that professional agency is achieved by an individual's situating actions based on their life history (prior experiences) and their social environment. From this ecological approach, agency is a temporal and situated achievement. That is, the context in which teachers operate can both enable and restrict their agency, and it emerges from the interplay of iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions.

Lastly, Tao & Gao (2021) discuss the significance of language teacher agency, noting its role in facilitating educational changes and fostering the professional growth of teachers, ultimately leading to enhanced student learning. They also highlight that teachers exert agency for moral, change and pedagogical purposes including teacher agency for learning to teach, implementing educational policies (curriculum reforms), advocating social justices and developing professionally.

Table 1

Major conceptualizations of agency

	Social cognitive theory	Sociocultural theory	Post-structuralist view	Ecological perspective
Major sources	Bandura (1999, 2001)	Wertsch et al. (1993)	Davies (1990); Davies & Harré (1999)	Eteläpelto et al. (2013); Priestley et al. (2015)
Definition	Agency as individuals' intentional acts	Agency as a socioculturally mediated capacity to act	Agency as a form of discursive practice	Agency as a temporal and situated achievement
Key concepts	Self-efficacy belief, knowledge	Intermental functioning, mediational tools	Positioning, knowledge	Identity, emotion, belief

Note: This table shows the main conceptualizations of agency. Adapted from the book *Language teacher agency* by Tao & Gao (2021).

All the previous studies have been conducted using a school environment as a point of reference, but there isn't much research about the role of teacher agency in non-institutional online tutoring sessions with adults. Once again, as this area remains unexplored, we aim to delve into it to contribute to the literature. For this research project, we have decided to adopt the holistic conceptualization of teacher agency from the *ecological perspective* as it was presented by Priestley et al. (2015). However, to make the conceptual framework easier to grasp,

we will synthesize teacher agency in the words of Zeichner (2019) as “situations where teachers have the capacity to exercise their discretion and judgment in adapting their instruction and curriculum to

meet the diverse and changing needs of their students” (p. 6).

Pedagogical Practices in Educational Contexts

One early conceptualization of pedagogical practice was introduced in a research article by Posada Ortiz & Patiño Garzón (2007). They approach pedagogical practice as “a gradual process that validates the construction of didactics and the incorporation of science and technology in the educational environment” (p. 127). The authors propose that pedagogical practices are shaped by three key concepts: intention, knowledge, and comprehension.

According to their theory, teachers’ actions are driven by their beliefs, which in turn define the intentions and objectives for their professional actions. Additionally, their background knowledge, which is based on theories of language and learning, life experience, and personal beliefs, affects what they do in class. Lastly, the teacher's comprehension of the context, the students and themselves, as social agents, allows them to convey their pedagogical knowledge through theory, action, and reflection (Posada Ortiz & Patiño Garzón, 2007).

Westbrook et al. (2014) assert that pedagogic practice evolves two specific teacher attitudes: what they do in the classroom and what they see as the outcome of their practice, promoting the adoption of interactive and communicative strategies. These attitudes construct the teaching and learning process as an interactive, communicative process in which teaching involves provoking a visible response in students that indicates that learning is taking place. All this led to three specific strategies that promoted this interactive pedagogy: 1. Feedback,

sustained attention, and inclusion; 2. Creating a safe environment in which students are supported in their learning; 3. Drawing on students' backgrounds and experiences.

These attitudes involve teachers maintaining a positive outlook toward their training and students, positioning them to view the teaching and learning process as interactive and communicative. This perspective encourages teachers to elicit visible responses from students, indicating successful learning.

Jaime Osorio & Insuasty (2015) conducted a study at a foreign language Institute of a Colombian public university providing valuable insights into teaching practices. On the one hand, they assert that teaching practice is “the professional work of a teacher in the classroom, supported by different beliefs, research, theories, and models” (p. 47). Expanding on this, they explain that teachers plan, select, and review their teaching strategies based on their knowledge of the students, activities, language use and structure, and skills before implementing them in the classroom. On the other hand, they claim that within the realm of English language teaching, the communicative approach stands out as the most prominent pedagogical practice.

Sichula & Genis (2019) conducted a qualitative case study in Zambia using interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, to explore the pedagogical practices used in non-formal adult literacy classes. They emphasize that adult learning focuses on individual needs, suggesting that teachers should adapt and select teaching-learning strategies accordingly. In their exploration of non-formal adult learning, the researchers highlight the significance of fostering a learner-centered pedagogy that adjusts to the student's interests and aspirations. Moreover, they argue that understanding learners' knowledge, aspirations, learning styles, and interests plays a crucial role in guiding decisions regarding learning and teaching methods.

Insuasty & Jaime Osorio (2020) carried out a qualitative study evaluating the impact of collaborative action research in the transformation of the pedagogical practices of teachers at a Foreign Language Institute of a Colombian University. They define pedagogical practices from the communicative language teaching perspective as “a dialectic interaction between the English language teacher and the sociocultural and educational setting which permeates the role he or she is expected to play in the language classroom” (p. 67).

Parra-Bernal et al. (2021), conducted a relatively recent documentary research on innovative pedagogical practices in education, addressing the pedagogical practice from the ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. The ontological focuses on human nature and aims to shape individuals who continuously learn within a school context. From the epistemological perspective, it is directed to knowledge construction, highlighting the student as a key participant who learns actively and can become an active agent of their learning. From the theoretical view, theory and practice are both connected to develop new learning for students and educators. Lastly, from the methodological perspective, it is a dynamic process of continuous reflection, communication, and interaction having the curriculum at its core axis.

Ripoll et al. (2021) describe pedagogical processes as the hands-on application of planned actions and interactions, structured within a teaching sequence with the goal of attaining learning objectives. This definition, particularly discussed in the context of training educators, underscores the cultivation of competencies and skills within and beyond the classroom.

In summary, the notion of pedagogical practice encompasses a multifaceted landscape, drawing insights from various scholarly perspectives. While reviewing the literature, we noticed

several aspects related to pedagogical practices. One of them concerns the diverse ways researchers approach this concept. Another aspect has to do with the language used. Research articles are normally found both in English as *teaching practices* or *educational practices* and in Spanish as *prácticas pedagógicas*. In terms of time, it was quite challenging to find updated conceptualizations of pedagogical practices of the last five years, perhaps there hasn't been much interest in it recently.

The exploration of pedagogical practices reveals a dynamic and interconnected framework that extends beyond the classroom, shaping the professional development of educators and influencing the learning experiences of students in diverse educational settings. For the purposes of our project, we have adopted the term "pedagogical practices" from both a methodological and communicative approach, viewing it as a dynamic process of continuous reflection, communication, and interaction having the curriculum at its core axis (Jaime Osorio & Insuasty, 2015; Parra-Bernal et al., 2021).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The following section will provide a thorough overview of the research design shaping the project, encompassing four main components: methodological approach, study type, context and participants, and the techniques and instruments for collecting data.

Methodological approach

The research study corresponds to a qualitative phenomenological design with multiple cases (Pérez, Lagos, Mardone & Saenz, 2017), where “questions about people's understandings, experiences, and sense-making activities, are asked and situated within specific contexts” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 47). Moreover, phenomenological designs focus on the subjective and individual

experiences of the participants. Qualitative research focuses on comprehending and interpreting human behavior, experiences, and phenomena in detail aiming to gain insights about the intricate aspects of social phenomena. Some essential characteristics of qualitative analysis are to describe experiences from their perspective and voice, reconstruct stories, and comprehend the depth that surrounds the context. The obtained responses were analyzed using deductive content analysis which began with a predefined set of codes based on research questions and existing frameworks, aiming to characterize and comprehend a social phenomenon based on individuals' points of view (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014).

The typology to address this research was from both a semi-structured (Días, Torruco, Martínez & Varela, 2013) interview which according to King and Horrocks (as cited in Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014) allows an intimate, flexible, and open approach, and a narrative inquiry. According to Barkhuizen (2014), people make sense of their experiences by using stories which allows researchers to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.

The semi-structured interview comprised six questions focused on informed decisions made autonomously by online English teachers, considering their professional training criteria. The objective was to propose academic guidelines that transform pedagogical practices with adults based on narrative analysis. The interview script designed (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014), underwent validation by three expert judges in English teaching within virtual learning environments. One of the experts holds a master's degree in education, another has a master's degree in English as a Foreign Language and the third expert is a PhD. In Education and holds a Master's in Pedagogy and Human Development. After adjustments based on evaluators' feedback, interviews were conducted.

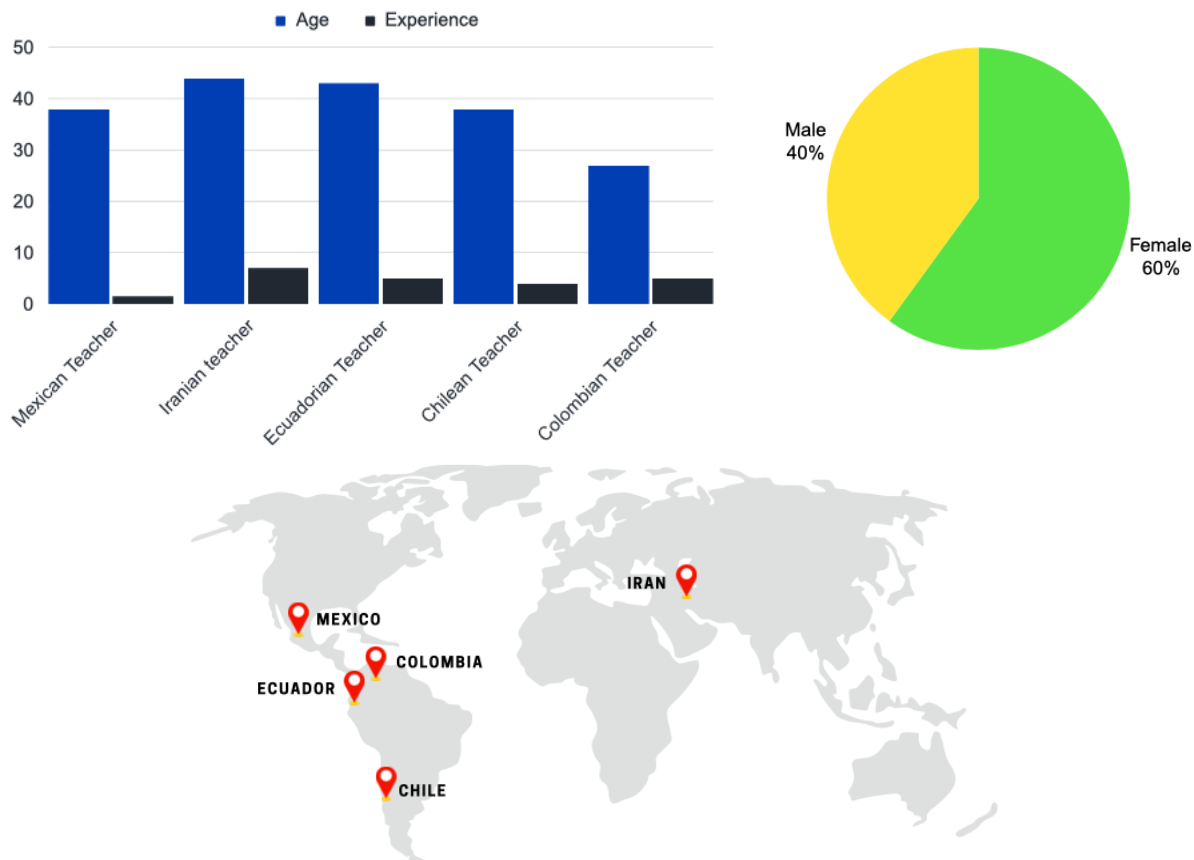
Context and Participants.

Synchronous interviews were conducted at a specific moment and were not repeated at different points over time to capture a snapshot of participants' experiences, opinions, or circumstances at a particular moment. The interviews with participants were carried out in an online environment such as video call platforms like Zoom and Google Meet where participants answered the questions of the semi-structured interview. On the other hand, the narrative frame was asynchronous. The participants had the opportunity to answer and complete the narrative frame in a different moment chosen by them and did not require the presence of the researchers. The sample consisted of five participants: 3 females and 2 males, all of them teachers with professional experience in teaching English online in a non-institutional way with an average of minimum 6 months of experience, who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research study. This makes it a non-probability sample by convenience, in other words, participants are selected according to their availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in the study (Otzen & Mamterola, 2017).

These teachers, who come from five different nationalities in Latin America and the Middle East: Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, and Iran, enrich the study with their diverse cultural perspectives and rich international teaching experience. Not only do they offer insights into navigating online English tutoring in different cultural contexts, but their experiences working in countries with such cultural richness and diversity in perceptions of education provide unique perspectives on adapting teaching practices to the varied educational ecosystems and diverse needs of learners within the non-institutional online environment. This breadth of experience allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by online English teachers in non-traditional settings.

All participants fully met the selection criteria. Before beginning data collection, all participating teachers were given an informed consent form to ensure the ethics of the research and to protect the rights and welfare of the study subjects.

Figure 2



Note: This figure illustrates the participants' characterization.

Techniques and Instruments for Collecting Information

A semi-structured interview script was developed to explore the informed decisions made autonomously by online English teachers, grounded in their professional training criteria

(Barkhuizen et al., 2014), aimed to identify the attributes of a non-institutional online learning environment.

The following topics were addressed: what decisions and actions do you take with your students during online English tutoring sessions, describe a meaningful teaching experience during an online English session, from your perspective, why do you think students seek out these online classes, what challenges have you faced when developing online English sessions, what advantages have you found in developing online English sessions, what characteristics identify your online English sessions, what makes them unique or special. This script was validated by three expert judges who assessed its structure. Subsequently, the relevance, significance, and semantics of each question were analyzed. After making adjustments based on the suggestions of evaluators, the interview was conducted with participants in a flexible way based on the information obtained during the interview about which the interviewer could explore or expand the information shared by the interviewed and reformulate or introduce a new question to explore significant data.

The interview was designed for teachers with a professional experience of over 6 months teaching English online and who are based in various countries. The instrument consists of 7 items, with the first item focusing on Agency and the decisions and actions taken by teachers during online English tutoring sessions. The second item is focused on the pedagogical practices of teachers based on experiences. The third item focuses on exploring the perspective of teachers regarding the needs of students. The fourth item seeks to focus on the difficulties experienced by teachers during online non-institutional tutoring. The fifth item focuses on the positive aspects perceived by teachers when teaching online. The sixth item focuses on attributes of bilingual learning environments.

Additionally, the Narrative Frame instrument (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) was applied as a structured framework or set of guidelines to gather qualitative information through the narratives or stories of the participants providing a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data by guiding participants to share their experiences or perspectives in a coherent and meaningful manner. In the context described earlier, the Narrative Frame is designed to collect data about online English teachers' experiences and perspectives. Participants were asked to share meaningful experiences from their non-institutional online tutoring sessions with adults. The instrument is divided into 3 sections; the first one focuses on specific information of the teachers, the second one wants to explore past and present experiences and what the future should be like, and the third one explores personal accomplishments obtained by teaching online.

The following topics were addressed: my story as an English teacher began when, I was motivated to teacher online because, as time passed by I found out that an important factor to develop my online tutoring it is important to, the main reason why I teach English online is, my online tutoring sessions usually focus on, to ensure my students accomplish the learning they require I, to decide how to teach my sessions online, what strategies, content, or material I must use I, when I teach online I feel, some of the skills I have developed as an English teacher online are, a way to encourage the participation of my students online I.

This narrative frame was designed based on existing models (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Subsequently, for this instrument, the relevance, significance, and semantics of each question were analyzed too.

Procedure

The research was carried out in 6 phases. In the first phase, the literature review was conducted on non-institutional online English, Teacher Agency, and Pedagogical practices in educational contexts. In the second phase, items for the interview script were developed. In the third phase, adjustments were made to the interview script. In the fourth phase, 5 structured interviews were conducted. In the fifth phase, the narrative framework instrument was applied. Finally, in the sixth phase, the collected information was analyzed using deductive content analysis (Ghuix, 2008) with the software Atlas TI version 8.

The research adhered to Colombian legislation (Congress of Colombia Resolution 8430, 1993) - which dictates the scientific, technical, and administrative standards for health research in the country - and classifies survey-type studies without manipulation of behavior, with research without risk or minimal risk to participants; with ethical parameters that ensure the integrity and safety of research participants.

Legal Considerations

Resolution 15177 of August 02, 2022, Article 3. Distance methodology. Distance learning involves, by its nature, simultaneous encounters held in physical spaces in an infrastructure different from an Educational Institution headquarters provided by it, as well as in virtual spaces mediated by tools and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Additionally, it includes non-simultaneous, autonomous activities that do not necessarily correspond to technological tools. Article 4. Distance methodology with a virtual education strategy. It is a type of teaching that takes place through learning environments that require the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as the main training environment.

Digital educational content is developed, allowing the student to progress autonomously and non-simultaneously in their learning process, supported by group work sessions and tutorials with hours of teacher support. When an institution that provides educational services for work and human development offers a program under this methodology, it must ensure a minimum of 80% virtual content in the curriculum.

Non-formal education is a learning process that takes place in non-school settings. It is a form of education that occurs outside the programs established by the official educational system. This education is related to everyday experience, interests, needs, and values of each individual. The non-formal context or setting includes all individuals interested in self-discipline for study and calls for learning proposals conceived and directed towards a group of people with common characteristics and interests.

Additionally, the creation of online educational programs is protected by Decree 1295 of 2010, as in Colombia, distance education is presented as a methodology with two modalities: traditional distance and virtual distance, the latter of which has experienced significant growth in recent years, meeting the needs and interests of the population.

Decree 4904 of 2009, Chapter 1. The purpose of this decree is to regulate the creation, organization, and operation of institutions offering educational services for work and human development, formerly known as non-formal education, and establish the basic requirements for the operation of programs for work and human development.

According to Law 115 of 1994, informal education is considered any knowledge acquired freely and spontaneously from individuals, entities, mass media, print media, traditions, customs, social behaviors, and other unstructured sources. Article 5 lists the purposes of education in accordance with Article 67 of the Political Constitution. Education will be developed with the

following purposes: numeral 1. The full development of personality without more limitations than those imposed by the rights of others and the legal order, within a process of integral formation, physical, psychic, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, affective, ethical, civic, and other human values; numeral 2. Training in respect for life and other human rights, peace, democratic principles, coexistence, pluralism, justice, solidarity, and equity, as well as the exercise of tolerance and freedom; numeral 9. The development of critical, reflective, and analytical capacity that strengthens national scientific and technological progress, oriented with priority to the cultural improvement and quality of life of the population, participation in the search for alternative solutions to problems, and the social and economic progress of the country; numeral 11. Training in the practice of work through technical knowledge and skills, as well as the appreciation of work as the foundation of individual and social development; and numeral 13. The promotion in the individual and in society of the ability to create, investigate, adopt the technology required in the country's development processes, and enables the learner to enter the productive sector (Congress of Colombia, Law 115 of 1994).

DATA ANALYSIS

This section comprises the analysis of data collected with the selected instruments. This qualitative study aimed to propose academic guidelines that transform pedagogical practices with adults based on narrative analysis. It used the *thematic analysis for multiple case studies*, described by Barkhuizen et al. (2014) as an approach that involves re-reading collected data, categorizing and coding sample excerpts, and organizing them in thematic headings. This is an approach that facilitates data analysis when dealing with multiple case studies because it enables

researchers to compare narratives in a data set, establish common themes, and spot particular differences.

Data collection involved a period of two months, during which both semi-structured interviews and narrative frames were conducted. The first data collection instrument applied was the semi-structured interview, chosen for its perceived greater time demand, and it provided us with a thorough understanding of the information sought. This initial phase allowed for adjustments and refinements to the narrative frameworks, ensuring a more accurate application of this instrument. The second applied instrument was a narrative frame, and it consisted of a written story following incomplete sentences and blank spaces (Barkhuizen, 2014). It was used to collect information about the teacher's personal life history, teaching experience within online English tutoring sessions, and considerations about the future of education. The narrative frame was designed considering the ecological perspective of the teacher agency described by Priestly et al. (2015), where their past experiences, their present conditions, and their future goals are the basis for performing agentic choices and actions.

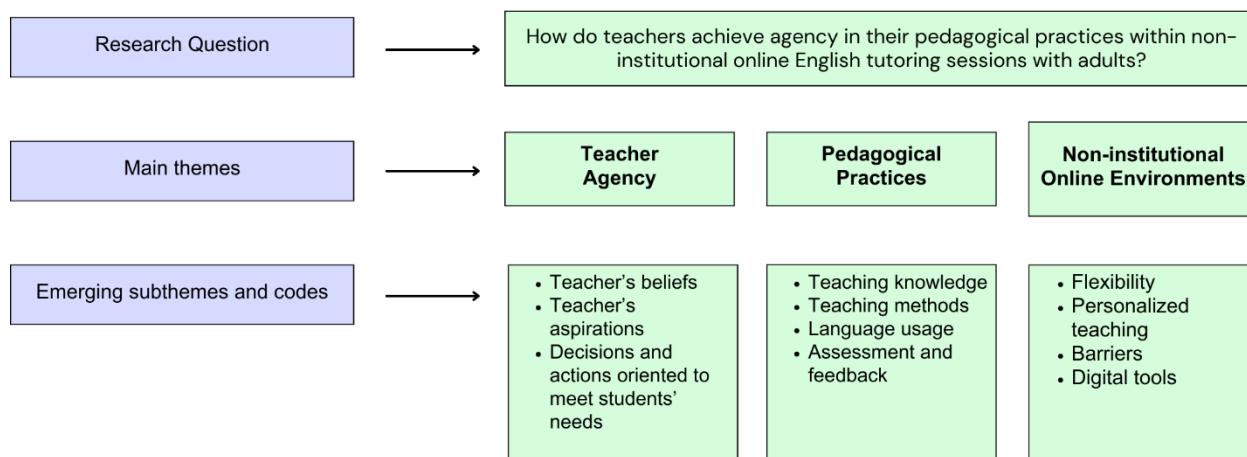
To count on a variety of participants, we reach out to the English Language teachers through Facebook groups like "English teachers in Colombia", "English Teachers Mexico", "Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras UIS", and WhatsApp. Interested teachers contacted us and showed their willingness to collaborate with the research process. Some of them even sent the signed consent form, but due to their busy lives as teachers, they couldn't fulfill the instruments, so their participation in the project was slowed down. Eventually, only 7 teachers submitted the

signed consent forms, took time to complete the semi-structured interview, and filled in the narrative frame. Out of these 7 teachers, we selected 5 to do the data analysis.

To facilitate the process, we allowed the participants to answer both the semi-structured interview and the narrative frame in Spanish, so that teachers could feel more comfortable and could express their ideas with clarity, avoiding misunderstandings. Four of them answered in Spanish, and one of them in English. The latter being an Iranian teacher, whose mother tongue is Persian. The interviews were recorded in MP3 format and later converted to text using the Riverside online platform. Then, we created a thematic analysis table with the main categories and subcategories based on Mosquera-Pérez et al. (2022).

Table 2

Thematic Analysis

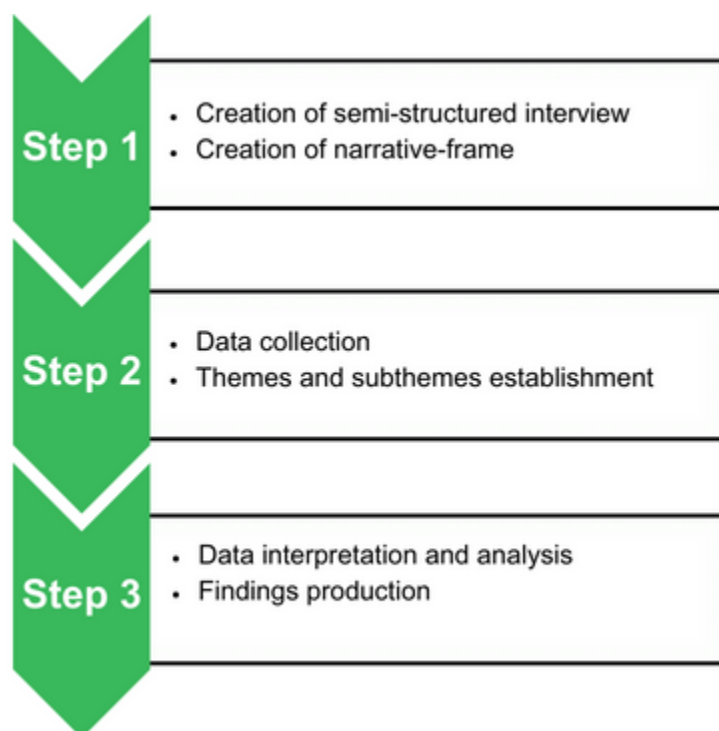


Note: This table shows the themes, subthemes, and codes regarding the research question.

The data collection was coded using a table in which the themes, sub-themes, and codes to be used were recorded, in contrast to the sample excerpts extracted from the semi-structured interviews and the narrative frames. In order to conduct the data analysis, the researchers followed a three-step path: Step 1. The creation of the two data collection instruments (semi-structured interview and narrative frame) to start collecting data from the participants. Step 2. The data from the participants was gathered, and the researchers established the themes and subthemes based on the literature presented for the project, resulting in 3 main themes: Teacher agency, Pedagogical Practices, and Non-institutional environments. Step 3. The data was interpreted and analyzed leading to writing the findings of it.

Figure 3

Steps of data analysis



Note: This figure illustrates the process for data analysis.

Findings

The following table was created to assign a code to each teacher who participated in the interviews and the narrative frames. Throughout the findings section we will refer to them according to their own coding to quote some excerpts.

Table 3

Participants coding and their contributions and positions towards Teacher Agency and Non-institutional learning environments.

Teacher coding for data collection instrument / Contributions and positions	Mexican Teacher	Iranian Teacher	Ecuadorian Teacher	Chilean Teacher	Colombian Teacher
Semi-structured Interview	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
Narrative Frame	NF1	NF2	NF3	NF4	NF5
Contributions to the Non-institutional learning environments	Barriers, Technological infrastructure	Aspirations and goals	-	Constrains	Digital materials
Positions about Teacher Agency	Teacher's beliefs	Flexibility in terms of time and space	Aspirations about his work	-	Decisions oriented to meet students' needs

Note: This table shows the participants' coding according to the data collection instrument as well as their contributions and positions *towards Teacher Agency and Non-institutional learning environments*.

Teacher Agency within non-institutional online environments

As it was mentioned earlier, we have decided to address the concept of teacher agency from an ecological perspective, defined as a temporal and situated achievement which comprises

the *iterative* (past and professional history), *practical-evaluative* (decision making and action), and *projective* (aspirations about students' interests and development) dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015; Gao & Tao, 2021). The results of this study show that within the non-institutional online English tutoring sessions, teachers achieve agency in terms of their beliefs, aspirations, and actions and decisions oriented to meet students' needs.

Teacher's beliefs

This subcategory is immersed in the three dimensions of agency. In regards to the teacher's beliefs, Priestly et al. (2015) affirm that they provide teachers with meaningful actions and direction. Out of the five teachers interviewed, three of them gave significant contributions to understanding how beliefs play an important role in the way teachers exercise agentic actions to benefit adult learners. The following excerpts of the interview provide insight of teachers' beliefs:

Excerpt from E1 “Y en una curva de aprendizaje siempre se van a cometer errores. Los errores son parte del aprendizaje.” (And in a learning curve, mistakes are always going to be made. Mistakes are part of learning.)

Excerpt from E4 “si la emoción no está presente, no hay aprendizaje” (if the emotion is not present, there is no learning)

Excerpt from E5 “para un adulto siempre va a ser más difícil aprender un idioma nuevo” (it will always be more difficult for an adult to learn a new language).

These teachers advocate three core beliefs for effective learning in non-institutional online environments: mistakes, emotions, and difficulties. They highlight that learning is not possible without mistakes, emotion is necessary for learning, and adults face difficulties when

learning a new language. Although those beliefs could be rooted in their individual prior teaching experiences or professional education, they serve as starting points to exercise agentic actions. Thus, non-institutional online settings constitute spaces where adult students can make mistakes freely without fear of being judged, they are also encouraged to express themselves through their emotions, and they can receive immediate feedback and support in case of difficulties.

Teacher's aspirations

This is an important subcategory related to the projective dimension of teacher agency. Priestly et al. (2015) emphasizes that the actions a teacher performs in class are driven by their short-term aspirations to give pleasant lessons, do interesting activities, and fulfill a curriculum. In the narrative frames, all the five participants expressed their aspirations in terms of desires about the future of online tutoring sessions, and their responses are summarized in the following way:

- Certified by the government.
- Adjusted to the students' needs.
- Most massively accepted or sought after.
- Better paid, with students from different countries and cultures
- Better resources

This is an example of an excerpt taken from one of the five narrative frames:

Excerpt from NF5: “me gustaría que las tutorías de inglés en línea fueran reguladas por entes gubernamentales y educativos que certifiquen los procesos” (I would like online English tutoring to be regulated by governmental and educational bodies that certify the processes)

Teachers' aspirations in non-institutional online English sessions are shaped by the long-term

expectations of having better opportunities that can benefit both teachers and students. Reflecting on the future of education, these teachers express their positive vision from a sustainable perspective. They would like these sessions to be highly accepted by people, to be validated by the government with certifications, to be better paid involving students from all over the world, and to have better available resources.

Decisions and actions oriented to meet students' needs.

Drawing on the ecological approach of teacher agency, this subcategory corresponds to the practical-evaluative dimension. In day-to-day working experience, teachers have to make important decisions and actions that confront them with the reality of education. They are usually involved in solving problems and proposing alternatives based on their professional expertise and available resources (Priestly et al., 2015; Tao & Gao, 2021). When comparing the data of the interviews and the narrative frames, we found out that a visible pattern was constantly expressed by teachers in their intentions to deliver their lessons in a non-institutional online environment: *meet the students' interests and needs.*

These excerpts are a sample of the reiterative nature of the answers given by teachers:

Excerpt from E5:“al ser una tutoría personalizada, pues se enfoca en lo que el estudiante quiera” (as it is a personalized tutoring, it is focused on what the student wants.)

Excerpt from E4 “desarrollamos un plan de acción para la persona...implica estudiar a la persona, saber qué le es fácil, dónde tiene mayor dificultad, qué le gusta hacer, qué no, etc” (we develop an action plan for the person...it involves studying the person, knowing what is easy for him/her, where he/she has the greatest difficulty, what he/she likes to do, what he/she doesn't like to do, etc)

Excerpt from EI “hay que estar como bastante vivos a la hora de revisar las dificultades, las oportunidades que tiene cada alumno y sobre eso ir ajustando la dinámica de trabajo” (it is necessary to be quite clever when reviewing the difficulties, the opportunities that each student has and, based on that, adjust the work dynamics)

Excerpt from NF5 “Para decidir cómo impartir las tutorías de inglés en línea, qué estrategias, contenido y materiales debo usar me baso en un análisis de necesidades del estudiante” (We have to be quite lively when it comes to reviewing the difficulties and opportunities that each student has and adjusting the work dynamics based on that)

Excerpt from NF3 “yo diseño un plan de trabajo en base a sus necesidades, nivel de inglés inicial y el tiempo de trabajo disponible” (I design a work plan based on your needs, initial English level and available work time)

Excerpt from NF4 “Mis tutorías de inglés en línea usualmente se enfocan en las necesidades del estudiante, cuales sean” (NF4)

Based on these responses, it is possible to conclude that teachers achieve their agency through the decisions and actions that they make oriented to meet the specific needs and interests of adult students. To do so, teachers evaluate the students’ strengths and weaknesses, develop an action plan, conduct a need analysis, and design a work plan.

Pedagogical practices in non-institutional online environments

There are many different ways to conceptualize pedagogical practices according to literature, but for this research study, the focus is on the methodological and communicative approaches. Pedagogical practices refer to a dynamic process of continuous reflection,

communication, and interaction having the curriculum at its core axis (Jaime Osorio & Insuasty, 2015; Parra-Bernal et al., 2021). After doing the thematic analysis, the results demonstrate that pedagogical practices are associated with these codes: teaching knowledge, teaching methods, language use, and assessment and feedback.

Teaching Knowledge

Teaching knowledge appears as a key theme highlighting its central role in shaping online English tutoring practices. The findings reveal various ways in which teachers use both their content and technological knowledge to create engaging and effective learning experiences for adult learners. Out of the five teacher participants, four mentioned the importance of having a clear knowledge regarding this matter. This suggests that teaching knowledge is not just relevant, but crucial for online teachers to navigate the unique challenges and opportunities of the online learning environment.

For instance, E2 indicates, “Una característica importante a la hora de dictar tutorías personalizadas virtuales es no improvisar, sino estar preparado para cualquier cosa” (*“A key characteristic of virtual personalized tutoring is not to improvise, but to be prepared for anything.”*). This statement underscores the crucial role of knowledge in non-institutional online settings where teachers often operate without the predetermined curriculum and structured resources of traditional institutions. Online teachers in non-institutional environments need to demonstrate a proactive and adaptable approach, drawing upon their existing knowledge and acquiring new information to address the diverse needs and unpredictable situations that may arise in each session.

Teaching methods

The dynamic nature of non-institutional online learning environments demands flexible and adaptable teaching methods. Based on the data collected through both semi-structured interview and narrative frame, non-institutional online teachers operate in a constantly evolving landscape where individualized instruction, active learning approaches, technology integration, and continuous reflection become essential elements for language teaching. These findings confirm that pedagogical practices in this context are not static techniques, but rather dynamic processes informed by a strong foundation in diverse and adaptable teaching methods.

Most of the participant teachers showcased in their narrative frames demonstrate how they focus the non-institutional online English sessions on the students' needs:

Excerpt from NF1: “Mis tutorías de inglés en línea usualmente se enfocan en lo que mis alumnos me soliciten.” (*My online English tutoring usually focuses on whatever my students request of me*)

Excerpt from NF5: “Mis tutorías de inglés en línea usualmente se enfocan en las necesidades del estudiante.” (*My online English tutoring usually focuses on the student's needs.*)

Excerpt from NF2: “Me enfoco directamente en satisfacer las necesidades de cada estudiante” (*I focus directly on meeting the needs of each student.*)

Excerpt from NF4: “Diseño un plan de trabajo en base a sus necesidades, nivel de inglés inicial y el tiempo de trabajo disponible.” (*I design a work plan based on the student's needs, initial English level and available work time.*)

These excerpts demonstrate how the teachers focus their online English tutoring on the students' needs, applying a learner-centered approach. This aligns with the first principle of learning to design learning environments, which “recognizes the learners as its core participants and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners” proposed by the OECD (2017, p. 22). An online tutor has the opportunity to empower their adult students to take ownership of their learning journey which in turn leads them to more engaging and impactful learning experiences.

Language Usage

Several excerpts from the interviews and narrative frames mention that teachers keep a strong interaction with their students through a communicative approach. For instance, E5 mentions: “trato de enfocarlo a la parte conversacional” (*“I try to focus it on the conversational part”*). This statement declares the tutor's intention to prioritize conversational skills through language usage in their online sessions. Moreover, NF1 states: “me enfoco en el uso de la lengua” (*“I focus on the use of language”*). For this teacher her intention relies on the language use. Another teacher also mentions: “el propiciar que hagan preguntas, y también el enviarles ejercicios con los que ellos puedan interactuar” (*“facilitating them to ask questions, and also sending them exercises that they can interact with”*) NF5. This teacher implements strategies to promote student engagement through encouraging questions and providing interactive exercises. These English teachers can transform their pedagogical practices when they strategically prioritize students' conversational skills through the constant use of language. In these excerpts, teachers also add that they focus on activities that explicitly promote speaking practice, incorporating diverse formats like role-plays, discussions, and presentations. For us as

researchers, this illustrates that it is necessary to have a strong understanding of the various ways language can be used to support different learning goals and activities.

Assessment and Feedback

The OECD (2020) mentions that “teacher feedback is an important lever to improve teaching quality, since it aims to improve teachers’ understanding of their methods and practices” (p.165). In the non-institutional online environment, where adult learners often have diverse goals and learning styles, this statement rings particularly true. The following sections will delve deeper into the findings of this research, examining how online teachers in non-institutional settings implement assessment and feedback to empower adult learners and create transformative learning experiences.

When analyzing some excerpts taken from the semi-structured interviews and the narrative frames, there were several intriguing patterns related to assessment and feedback, which suggest a shift toward a more student-centered approach, defined by Taylor & Marienau (2022) as “shifting the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student, placing the student as the active agent in the learning process.”

Active student participation

The emphasis on active student participation in assessment and feedback seen in these excerpts showcases a powerful approach that empowers teachers to exercise agency in online English tutoring. By promoting deeper understanding, metacognition, and engagement, teachers can create transformative learning experiences for adult learners in non-institutional settings.

These excerpts are a sample of active student participation regarding assessment and feedback:

Excerpt from E1: "a la hora de que una persona explica lo que está aprendiendo es cuando realmente uno puede evaluar qué tanto es este grado de dominio" (*When someone explains what they are learning, that's when you can really assess their level of mastery*).

Excerpt from E1: "A veces también lo que puede funcionar es pedirles a ellos que te expliquen a ti" (*Sometimes, what can also work is asking them to explain to you*).

Diverse assessment strategies

Across the landscape of assessment and feedback, these excerpts illustrate diverse assessment strategies to reshape pedagogical practices:

Excerpt from E5: "lo que hago también es revisar que se haya entendido el tema, lo mismo, con una pregunta relacionada con el tema, o con un ejercicio gramatical de completar" (*What I also do is check if the topic has been understood, with a question related to the topic, or with a grammar completion exercise*).

Excerpt from NF3: "Una de las formas de fomentar la participación de mis estudiantes en mis tutorías de inglés en línea es mediante la presentación de actividades que activan conocimientos previos, juegos, herramientas que permiten a los estudiantes discutir ideas y generar productos" (*One of the ways I encourage my students' participation in my online English tutoring sessions is by presenting activities that activate prior knowledge, games, tools that allow students to discuss ideas and generate products*).

The excerpts from E5 and NF3 showcase a vibrant departure from traditional assessment methods in online English tutoring with adults. Instead of relying solely on standardized tests or

rote exercises, these tutors demonstrate agency by employing diverse assessment strategies that cater to different learning styles and provide a more comprehensive picture of student progress. These diverse strategies go beyond mere assessment, they become powerful pedagogical tools. By incorporating games, discussions, and product creation, teachers actively engage students in the learning process, fostering deeper understanding and retention. Therefore, the excerpts highlight how diverse assessment strategies are not just tools for measuring progress, but crucial elements in teachers' agency to create transformative learning experiences for adult learners in online English tutoring settings.

Continuous monitoring

Excerpt from E4: "vamos midiendo el desempeño de cada uno de nuestros estudiantes" (*We are measuring the performance of each of our students*).

Excerpt from NF3: "Yo me aseguro de generar instrumentos de evaluación fáciles de entender y que evidencien el progreso del estudiante." (*I make sure to generate evaluation instruments that are easy to understand and that demonstrate the student's progress*).

E4's statement, "vamos midiendo el desempeño" (*we are measuring the performance*), emphasizes the ongoing nature of assessment. It's not a one-time event, but a constant pulse-check that informs instruction. This allows teachers to identify areas of difficulty or confusion early on and tailor their approach to individual student needs. This flexibility empowers teachers to become responsive guides, adjusting their pace, materials, and feedback based on the ongoing performance of their students. NF3 reinforces this concept by highlighting the importance of clear and transparent assessment tools. By generating "instrumentos de evaluación fáciles de

entender" (*easy to understand evaluation instruments*), the teacher empowers students to actively participate in their own learning journey. They can track their progress, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and adjust their study strategies accordingly. By incorporating continuous monitoring into their practices, non-institutional online English teachers can create personalized and effective learning experiences for adult learners, transforming their role from passive instructors into active guides and facilitators of individual growth.

Attributes of a non-institutional Online Learning Environments

A learning environment constitutes a broad area of interest in the literature, and there are many variables from which it can be approached. As stated earlier in the literature review, it has been traditionally seen from a classroom perspective, but it has evolved to e-learning ecologies with their e-learning affordances such as the iconic terms “Ubiquitous Learning”, “Differentiated Learning” and “Multimodal Meaning” rooted in the reflexive pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2017). According to Castro (2019), a learning environment is a dynamic space where learning happens because there are some favorable conditions for learners to develop competences, values, and skills. Most updated literature refers to the characteristics of institutional learning spaces, but this analysis established the attributes of a non-institutional online learning environment using the theoretical framework in the literature as a point of comparison (Bates, 2022).

To begin with, we analyzed the attributes of the non-institutional online learning environment in contrast to the components of an effective learning environment as stated by Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2017). The results of the data analysis showed that three teachers in the interviews and three in the narrative frames repeatedly referred to four important aspects of

these non-institutional online learning spaces, which were structured in terms of flexibility (time and space, needs, economy), personalized teaching (small group or one-on-one, teacher-student rapport), barriers (constraints), and digital tools (virtual platforms, digital materials, access to information).

Flexibility

This subcategory involves time, space, economy, and students' needs as positive factors of online English tutoring. Several extracts referring to them were framed in this thematic analysis. Aligned with the e-learning affordability, these factors correspond to ubiquitous and differentiated learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2017).

The following are examples of the information expressed by teachers about flexible learning.

Excerpt from E2 : "I can teach classes in the morning, afternoon or evening and I can even teach classes on weekends"

Excerpt from NF5: "Estas clases les brindan la flexibilidad que no tienen en otros entornos. El poder ser dueños de su tiempo y acomodar las clases a su hora más conveniente es algo que llama mucho a las personas a aprender inglés de esta manera." (*These classes give them the flexibility that they don't have in other settings. Being able to own their time and schedule classes at a time that is convenient for them is something that attracts people to learn English this way*)

In summary, learning happens anytime, anywhere, anyhow, and it is adaptive to the student's interests because there is a lot of flexibility in time, space, needs, and economy.

Personalized teaching

Bates (2022) argues that Bilingual Learning Environments must be safe and supportive, flexible, encourage students' support, and develop teacher-student relationships. According to the data mostly in the interviews, personalized learning means small group or one-on-one sessions, and teacher-student rapport.

Excerpt from E1 “ya uno hace cierto rapport con los estudiantes y ellos ya se sienten con la confianza de decir mi sueño es así dentro de cinco años yo me veo trabajando en una de las empresas del grupo de donde yo estoy” (*one already has a certain rapport with the students and they already feel confident enough to say my dream is that in five years' time I see myself working in one of the companies of the group where I am*)

Excerpt from E3 “tú generas vínculos con personas que son un poco más personalizados” (*you make links with people, that are a little more personalized*)

These two excerpts taken from the interviews demonstrate the way teachers refer to personalized learning. Even teacher E3 explicitly mentions the word personalized. The other teacher uses the word rapport to tell that students feel confident with the English tutor to talk about their dreams.

Barriers

This is an emergent subcategory, and it is associated with the constraints mentioned by Priestly et al. (2015) when they describe the dimensions of teacher agency. In total, there are extracts from four interviews and three narrative frames, where teachers stand out in their positions regarding the constraints of the online English tutoring sessions:

Excerpt from E1: “muchas veces son actitudinales, hay veces que son barreras de infraestructura... incluso las barreras de infraestructura tecnológica, a uno como profesor le puede suceder, o sea, si uno está dando clases en un lugar donde está lloviendo demasiado y ya me ha pasado, si he tenido que de plano cancelarlas, porque se va la luz.” (Many times, they are attitudinal, sometimes they are infrastructure barriers... even technological infrastructure barriers, as a teacher it can happen to you, that is, if you are giving classes in a place where it is raining too much and it has already happened to me, I have had to cancel them because the power goes out).

Excerpt from NF5: “Necesitamos aceptar que la inteligencia artificial está con nosotros y no hay manera de negarlo o esconderlo” (*We need to accept that artificial intelligence is with us and there is no way to deny it or hide it*)

These barriers are present in online learning sessions, and they are normally out of the teacher’s control because they are related to technological infrastructure, students’ attitudes, internet connection, and environmental issues. They can come unexpectedly, and teachers are aware that is something they must deal with. However, in the excerpt NF5, the teacher mentions that sometimes the constraints can come from the teachers. For example, when talking about Artificial intelligence, he says that it should be accepted as it is sometimes denied by teachers.

Digital tools

Bates (2022) proposes the components for effective learning environments, one of them refers to available resources such as technology, learning spaces, and human support. On the other hand, Cope & Kalantzis (2017) use the term “Multimodal Meaning” to describe rich media texts and multimodal representations of knowledge as an e-learning affordance. When comparing

these two theoretical perspectives, there were some extracts referring to digital tools in both the interviews and the narrative frames.

These excerpts support that argument.

Excerpt from E5: “el uso de todo el material virtual, que se encuentra afortunadamente para la enseñanza inglesa” (*the use of all the virtual material, which is fortunately available for English teaching*)

Excerpt from NF4: “la tecnología te permite tener una gran variedad de datos fácilmente para tomar decisiones en múltiples aspectos” (*technology allows you to have a wide variety of data easily to make decisions in multiple aspects*)

In general terms, respondents mention that elements like virtual platforms, digital material, and a variety of digital data facilitates the teaching process and allows teachers to be always updated.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of data analysis, the understanding of how teachers achieve agency, and the attributes of non-institutional online environments, we propose the following academic guidelines to transform the pedagogical practices with adults:

1. **Embrace Mistakes, Emotions, and Difficulties:** Encourage an open learning environment where mistakes are seen as essential, emotions are valued, and difficulties are acknowledged. This would allow adult learners to express freely and receive immediate support.
2. **Tailor Teaching to Individual Needs:** Exercise agency by evaluating each adult student's strengths and weaknesses. Develop personalized action plans, conduct need

analyses, and design work plans that aligns to the specific needs and interests of individual learners.

3. ***Diversify Assessment Strategies:*** Foster recursive feedback that helps students learn and improve along the way. Employ diverse assessments to encourage learners to explore, make mistakes, and refine their understanding in a continuous cycle of improvement. (OECD, 2017; Araque, 2021)
4. ***Improve Online Teaching:*** Promote flexible, personalized teaching by prioritizing adaptability to learners' time, space, and needs. Address limitations and leverage digital tools, including virtual platforms and materials, to improve accessibility and enrich the online learning experience for both teachers and students.

Limitations

It is imperative to acknowledge specific limitations that shape the boundaries of this study. Firstly, researchers faced challenges associated with the concept of teacher agency, which appears to lack widespread recognition or exploration among educators.

Another notable limitation was the geographical location and dispersion of the researchers, who were involved in demanding working schedules. These conditions challenged researchers to coordinate discussions and collaborative work in synchronous times. The need for synchronicity in discussions is crucial to foster real-time exchanges of ideas, facilitate immediate clarification of concepts, and enhance the depth of collective understanding.

Additionally, lack of knowledge about how to use of the software Atlas.ti. impeded to make qualitative data analysis in a shorter time. Its effective use requires a substantial understanding of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Researchers had to

navigate a learning curve to comprehend the intricacies of the software, impacting the efficiency of data analysis and potentially introducing a source of variability in the interpretation of findings.

Another notable limitation raised from the scarcity of literature on non-institutional online English tutoring. The existing body of literature in this domain is either insufficient or, in some instances, nonexistent. Connected to this is the lack of clarity regarding the regulations and policies governing non-institutional online English tutoring.

Further investigation

Considering the acknowledged limitations, several critical avenues for further research emerge. This research could motivate the investigation of how non-institutional online learning environments contribute to broader societal goals, such as decolonization, social justice, educational democracy, plurilingualism, and multiculturalism. Understanding the potential role of these environments promotes inclusivity, equitable educational opportunities, and diversity and cultural richness.

Given the global nature of non-institutional online learning, future studies should explore how these environments foster plurilingualism and multiculturalism, investigating how language diversity and cultural inclusivity are addressed in non-institutional online English tutoring. Further research should focus on understanding how policies can be crafted to guarantee effective and ethical learning environments.

In addition, exploring how the concept of decentralization of education at a micro level could be realized within non-institutional online learning environments would be a valuable area of investigation. Understanding how these environments empower educators and learners at an

individual or community level, fostering autonomy and localized decision-making, could provide insights into the potential benefits and challenges associated with decentralized educational models.

Furthermore, the study of the hidden curriculum within non-institutional online learning environments is essential. Uncovering the implicit messages, values, and norms that shape the learning experience beyond the explicit curriculum can provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics at play.

By going further into these areas, researchers can bridge existing gaps in the literature and contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on education, equity, and the transformative potential of non-institutional online learning environments. These suggestions align with contemporary educational priorities, emphasizing social justice, diversity, and the democratization of education.

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Appendixes

- Appendix A [Narrative Frames](#)
- Appendix B [Semi-structured interviews](#)
- Appendix C [Informed Consents](#)
- Appendix D [Thematical Analysis](#)