

STORY OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER SUSANA GÓMEZ

Life-experiences that portray English learning and teaching in the context of Distance
Education at Universidad Santo Tomás- Bogotá

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Universidad Santo Tomás de Aquino

Facultad De Educación

Licenciatura En Lengua Extranjera: Inglés

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Macroproject: ‘Understanding and characterizing EFL in the LLEI experiences and
phenomena in the pre-service teachers’ educational contexts”

Field of Research: ‘Use of English and its Contexts’

Subproject: ‘The voices of the LLEI realities: life stories and experiences’.

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By the student of the Research Mentorship Program: Diana Raquel Torres Mizar

I. CONTEXTUALIZATION

This research arises from a series of concerns related to the context of English learning and teaching in our country. For students of Education at Universidad Santo Tomás in the Bachelor of English Teaching as a Foreign Language, it is essential to develop a formative process in regards to English teaching and didactics, but also in relation to the way to do research in specific linguistic contexts. The BA program provides students –pre service teachers- the paths and guidelines for doing their research projects based on the establishment of macroprojects and subprojects, from which they are able to select according to factors such as: research interests and project feasibility. The following was the topic that best connected both factors mentioned above: interest and feasibility.

I currently conduct a narrative inquiry through the life-story of one specific teacher: Susana Gómez, towards her processes of learning and teaching English as a foreign language. This is the case in which a specific field of research has been identified, with the concerns related to the teacher's social educational experiences in a current urban context, and all the previous experiences she had in different contexts that led her to the language teaching career.

A. Research Statement

The story of a teacher is valuable to be investigated, as it provides crucial information in the context where it takes place, eliciting the different factors that involve teaching and learning from its natural source, giving their voice an audience and the possibility to generate an impact. The participant of this project is a language teacher, and she is willing to share all the personal life experiences that connect with language learning and teaching, and this particular narrative will be the phenomenon to analyze thematically. According to this, the descriptions that emerge

from this narrative account have the intrinsic power to tell the researchers something new about the acquisition of English as a foreign language (L2) and also about its teaching, as the life-story belongs to an English teacher of the distance modality, who naturally was also a language student, but coincidentally in the same modality: Distance Education.

In this way, we are making meaning of her particular life story and the way she interprets it, in relation to the language learning and teaching practices and realities. As stated by Riessman (2005):

“Narratives do not mirror, they refract the past. Imagination and strategic interests influence how storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others. Narratives are useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was. The “truths” of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future.” (P. 6)

Furthermore, as a student of the program I joined the Research Mentorship Program (RMP), in which I carry out an active research process together with two more students of the program. Thus, our research interests make part of a macroproject that corresponds to ‘Understanding and characterizing EFL in the LLEI experiences and phenomena in the pre-service teachers’ educational contexts”.

The macroproject is also connected with one of the fields of research, ‘Use of English and its Contexts’ and the subproject: ‘The voices of the LLEI realities: life stories and experiences’. The idea is to give voice to the protagonists of teaching and learning processes of English as a foreign language in different contexts, as this research is one part of a wider project of investigation which involves other participants, and what connects each of us is in one hand is the research interest: English learning and teaching in context, and in the other hand the life stories that emerged through the narrative design.

B. Research Question

How does a teacher’s life and experiences portray English learning and teaching in the context of Distance Education at Universidad Santo Tomás - Bogotá?

C. Objectives

- To describe how a teacher's life and her particular experiences portray English learning and teaching in the context of Distance Education at Universidad Santo Tomás Bogotá.
- To reflect on the pedagogical experiences that emerge from the description of the teacher's life story.

II. JUSTIFICATION

The relevance of this research project is based on a series of purposes, one of them is related to the formative process of the educational researcher, which is promoted in the Bachelor of English as a Foreign Language at Universidad Santo Tomás, where pre- service teachers develop professionally working on studies of theoretical and practical ambits. The context of this specific study is the Research Mentorship Program –RMP-, where students cooperate actively with faculty mentors to learn about the integration of research and teaching, by training processes of observing, reflecting and participating in research projects from educational, social, and regional contexts. This aims to answer to the challenges that take place in the context where the language teacher is expected to have an impact, from their role as a Colombian educator.

According to the above, these interests make part of a macroproject that corresponds to ‘Understanding and characterizing EFL in the LLEI experiences and phenomena in the pre-service teachers’ educational contexts” as stated in the research statement. The macroproject is also connected with one of the fields of research named: ‘Use of English and its Contexts’ and the subproject, “The voices of the LLEI realities: life stories and experiences”; as one of the points is to listen to the teacher's voices, and discover their contribution to the understanding of foreign language use in personal, social and educational contexts, and also how is it possible to project these experiences to the realities of hundreds of students and teachers in diverse contexts.

Another purpose relies on the pedagogical and social factors that limit the possibilities to conduct English teaching and learning processes nowadays. Consequently, it is meaningful to characterize what occurs in EFL contexts from a teacher's perspective, in order to comprehend the relationships that exist between the pedagogical theory and the reality that surrounds the social educational contexts. Parting from the idea of developing a formative experience in the RMP, it is expected that the project impacts the educational contexts where the research project

takes place, by assigning new meanings to the notion that pre-service teachers might have about the issues that take place in EFL classrooms or programs. It also aims to foster research leadership on its participants, in this opportunity through the implementation of a research narrative design, which will help to enlighten the way for other future pre-service teachers interested and willing to conduct these type of narrative studies, for their own personal development and the educative impact they expect to have in our society.

According to the above, in the comprehension of the context or environment is taken as reference the concept of ‘*Epistemological Turn*’ from Johnson (2006), cited by Laurentis, C & Porta, L. (2014) where it is mentioned the importance of approaching the foreign language research by understanding the pedagogical and teaching exercise which addresses principles of social practice, cultural, institutional and political factors that affect the foreign language learning; each one of these aspects that are expected to be reflected during the description of the life story of a specific teacher whose life is a sample model of what happens to thousands of students in the country, with a crescent willingness to develop a career in which the use of English as a foreign language is the key factor.

In the other hand, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) also begin their introduction on “*Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching*”, by describing a more specific ‘*Narrative Turn*’ and explaining how “*Narrative has become both a legitimate mode of thinking and writing research and the focal point of a variety of approaches that come under the heading of ‘narrative inquiry’*” (p. 1). Besides, as stated by these cited authors, it is important to generate a reflection about the EFL teacher role, the comprehension of the phenomena of their pedagogical exercise, and their narrative as a phenomena itself (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990).

From the theoretical contributions of Clandinin & Connelly (1990), Laurentis & Porta (2004), and Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik (2014), it is highlighted the necessity of renewing the research trends, under the influence of narrative inquiry and critical pedagogy, which study questions inherent to social contexts, and factors connected to the teacher’s identity and students’ language; in this case, the story of a particular individual will be the object of research, the language teacher: Susana Gómez. In this regards, in the article “*Voices of Practitioners*”, the author mentions the following: “*because teachers are the ones most affected by university-based research and the policies derived from such research, it seems reasonable that they would want*

to have the opportunity to contribute to the discourse on and knowledge base of research on teaching" (Stremmel, 2002, p. 4). In this research, the voice of the teacher is the key factor in the construction of a body of knowledge, with the positive impact that this story recounts and the reflection it generates on her own professional life as a teacher, learner and user of English in EFL contexts; even as a researcher herself.

Based on this, Stremmel explains how his work has shown the power of finding our voices as professionals in research processes, also how creating spaces for collaborative and critical inquiries about education are constantly emerging and even appear contradictory; but not pretending to be definite events in research tradition. Similar to the criticisms established by Clandinin and Connelly (1990) they outstand how there is an advance from perspectives where teaching was defined by those outside the profession, to the current points of view where teacher's research can actually help other teachers and teachers' educators to be more reflective, analytical, and responsive themselves. This is why engaging in teacher inquiry needs to be extended from academics and university-based researchers to all teachers and pre-service teachers in a new perspective offers 'hope' according to Stremmel: "*...the hope of recovering our voices, of elevating our status, and reclaiming our profession*" (p. 4).

During the encounters with the participant and the subsequent data analysis, some key aspects captured the researcher's attention in terms of language learning and teaching factors such as: Attitudes towards the language, use of English, paths of education, life experiences that finally led the participant to a language teaching career, among others subcategories. After determining a context, the place of birth of the participant and her current location, there has been also a convergence of regional contexts in her early life: from a rural context to an urban one (from Líbano -Tolima to Bogotá- Cundinamarca), details important to deepen in the study in combination with other episodes of mobility later in her life (Villavicencio-Meta/ Bogotá- Cundinamarca). Secondly, some life changes in terms of professional development and interests, determined relevant episodes of this life experiences as a L2 user, which modified her initial working expectations to a completely different one and finally led her to EFL teaching and learning.

The teacher, main subject of this study as is the status of the participant, decided to share her life story around EFL processes, as the field of investigation that supports a gathering of

meaningful experiences about language learning and teaching through this narrative inquiry. So far, it has been noticeable how teaching and learning are connected so closely, and how a not so encouraged language student becomes a professional language teacher on distance education, just to start the discovery of elements and features that characterize this story and its narrative as a phenomena and method itself (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p. 2).

Finally, this project will enrich the formative research processes in the B.A. program, and it will make an impact in the educational context where the research practice is going to be developed, assigning new meanings to the Language Research Mentorship Program notion about real current problems that characterize the foreign language contexts, and also where this academic program takes place, by fostering the investigation leadership of its students. Besides, the results are expected to lead to new investigation topics and contexts to approach from diverse research perspectives with a higher level of competence, to conduct scientific studies that lead to processes of intervention and pedagogical innovations, with all the necessary elements to increase our practical and theoretical production as language teachers and researchers.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This project embraces a series of key terms based on the theory of **Narrative Research**. In regards to the research question and the objectives of the project. One key term is *life-story*, defined by different authors cited here: Clandinin and Connelly (1990), Barkhuizen and Wette (2009), and Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014).

A. Life-Story in relation to Narrative Inquiry.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) explain the effect of stories in narrative inquiry as a way of experiencing the world:

“The story of narrative, therefore, is the study of the way humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories... To preserve this distinction we use the reasonable well-established device of calling the phenomenon “story” and the inquiry ‘narrative’.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p. 2).

The previous quote seems self-explanatory, and it is in terms of what is called ‘**life-story**’ in our context. Nevertheless, in terms of ‘**narrative**’, in our approach this distinction is not so strong because narrative is not only the method, but the phenomena itself as stated before: the story is established in a narrative form, and what we aim to do is to develop what Barkhuizen recalls under the exercise of narrative analysis: “*studies whose data consist of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories*” (p. 5). In sum, stories are the raw data of the present study, from where it is expected to discover the meanings and do the findings in regards to the educational EFL contexts.

B. Life-story in English Teaching and Learning

As students of a Bachelor in EFL Teaching, the idea of using narrative inquiry, besides helping us in doing the research, it is expected that it tells us something new and fresh about language teaching and learning, based on real life experiences of their protagonists. In this context, to focus in a life-story is a privileged field to use narrative inquiry for this purpose. As established by Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik “*to understand how language teachers and learners organize their experiences and identities and represent them to themselves and to others. In a field that very often favors abstract, theoretical understanding of processes over the particular, contextualized knowledge of participants* (Firth and Wagner, 1997)” (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 5). Immediately, the authors connect it with how it can also help us with the understanding of teaching and learning a language, from the teachers and learners’ direct perspective.

When talking about the context of written narrative, the authors also make emphasis on the fact that teachers usually reflect and write about their teaching practices for different purposes, mainly connected to their professional growth, and when assigning the narrative elements and organizing these writing with the proper instruments, it is a rich field for qualitative research.

Language teachers write about their *teaching* practice for professional development, usually for a course activity or assignment. The goal of the writing is explicitly for the professional development of the teacher writers, and may take the form of reflective journals or stories (Barkhuizen, 2008a; Golombek and Johnson, 2004). They write about their own teaching experiences (past or present) and typically relate these to the content of the course that they are

taking. The writing, usually in combination with other forms of data (typically interviews), can take the form of diaries (e.g., Tsui, 2007), reflective reports and journals (e.g., Liu and Xu, 2011; Poon, 2008), and narrative frames (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 34).

In addition, learning in this context is a process observed in several levels, one is the natural result of a conscious investigative route, which leads to acquiring new knowledge and abilities as EFL Bachelor students being also trained in research. The other level is learning as an element of study, as a phenomena that occurs as the main purpose of our career, we are training ourselves as language teachers, expecting that our future learners actually learn something, many things, meaningfully; and it is important to start analyzing the different contexts where this learning happens, or does not happen and why, with all the experiences that surround that so desired phenomenon: learning.

Finally, based on the authors' concept of Language Learning Histories (**LLHs**), we are going to focus on the participant LLHs, as one of the key themes of the project, where the experiences and attitudes towards EFL are going to be shared and described, its features and implications are explained in the following citations, clarifying the scope and sequence of these LLHs and how they have been used in previous studies.

Language learning histories (LLHs) are retrospective accounts of past learning. They are the written stories of language learning experiences. Benson (2011) points out that 'the word history suggests a long-term account, although the periods of time covered by LLHs can vary greatly, ranging from the entire period over which a person has learned a language to much shorter periods, such as a year or semester of study or an incident that lasts no more than a few minutes' (p. 548) Our concern... is how to go about obtaining written data which tells a learner's history (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chick, 2014, p. 38).

Barcelos (2008), for example, used the same questions in her study of learner beliefs about the place where they studied English (public school versus private English courses) and how these beliefs influenced their learning experiences... The questions prompted writing about the contexts of the students' learning experiences as well as, more specifically, sustained reflection on their actual experiences, attributions of success or failure, and any emotional issue (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chick, 2014, p. 39).

C. A Life-story in Distance Education

The English teacher that is sharing her life-story for the purpose of this narrative inquiry works at “Universidad Santo Tomás -Vicerrectoría de la Universidad Abierta y a Distancia”, this branch of the university focuses on distance education, understood as the methodology that allows students who desire to obtain a Bachelor Degree or a Master Degree in Education, to develop their academic process through blended spaces of: virtual mediation on-line with face to face sessions.

According to White (2003) the virtual interaction and the technology resources are not the defining features to achieve the learning goals throughout Distance Education processes, there are other factors as she states: “...*experienced distance educators and commentators argue repeatedly that technology per se is not as important as other factors such as learner motivation, an understanding of the distance language learning context and of the demands it places on participants, the responsiveness of the teacher, the accessibility of the learning context, and the overall context of delivery*” (p. 2). It is basic to outstand how the participant mentions each one of these factors, not parting from the theory but from her own experience as distance learner and now distance educator.

In regards to Distance Education, White (2003) makes an extensive explanation of this system through examples of experiences all over the world. The purpose was to explain the features and challenges of distance learning, also the advantages and limitations that may arise according to the specific characteristics of the participants and their context: the opportunities of cohort-based learning or immediate, personalized feedback, the possibilities for classroom-based tutoring, or the scheduling difficulties faced by specific type of students, the accessibility of an online learning environment, available 24/7, etc.

In distance education, the idea is to solve each of the problems that may arise. Therefore, the problem-solving capacity of teachers and learners in educative scenarios, continues to be a key for moving forward and advance as in any other methodology. In this matter the author mentions: “*Face-to-face meetings at the start of distance courses have been found to be important for motivation, developing a sense of learning community, and in easing access to initial learning events. However, the constraints of time and distance mean that this is not*

possible in many contexts” (p. 5). One of the features of the EFL Bachelor program at Santo Tomás University, is the right that students have to their face to face tutoring sessions at the beginning, middle and end of the course, depending on its intensity, method and number of credits. Some academic spaces require more of these tutoring sessions, some others are fully virtual and use different feedback strategies.

White (2003) shows two figures to describe the spectrum of distance language learning contexts and the basic possible combinations of time and place in learning contexts, setting a difference between the *traditional model* of education where teaching takes place in close proximity at a given time Vs. *distance education* where the focal point, or learning space, is no longer the classroom but it has shifted to other places (home, job, library, etc.); with a new flexibility on schedules that are susceptible to be negotiated according to time zones and availability of the participants. See the adaptation of the figures 1 and 2 based on the original document (White, 2003, p. 8), to make this topic clearer.

Figure 1- Distance Education Levels

Individual Based			Group Based	
Traditional correspondence course	Print-based course with electronic support systems	Multiple-media course combining synchronous and asynchronous media	Real-time e-chat, audio-conferencing via VLE, text-based materials sent electronically or by post	Language Classes delivered by satellite to multiple sites

Based on White, (2003)

Figure 2- Chronological and Spatial Relationships in Distance Education

	Same time	Different time
Same Place	ST-SP (classroom teaching, face-to-face tutorials, workshops)	DT-SP (learning centre/ self-access centre)
Different Place	ST-DP (synchronous distance learning)	DT-DP (asynchronous distance learning)

Based on White, (2003)

To connect the options that offers these type of programs with the needs of the participant of this project, now that after her graduation we can say she actually succeeded. Basically, Distance Education is not a type of ‘magic solution’ for all kind of educative needs in all kind of contexts, in fact, the author clarifies that not all learners respond equally well to it, given that: *“some learners prefer the structure provided by the regular timing of synchronous delivery –to have the course delivered in regular sessions at fixed times and to have their learning paced in this way – others find it a very real limitation”* (White, 2003. p. 11).

The last phenomenon can be related to the diversity of students, their personal learning styles and their particular living and social conditions. Also, the effectiveness in the interaction among teacher and learners is a key factor, despite the theoretical discussions on: where does **learning** actually happens? White continues the reflections of Richards and Roe (1994), who argue that it is confusing and deceptive to assume that in distance learning *“it is the individual learner who is distant, or remote, from the centre of things... it is in fact the teacher who is remote from where the learning takes place... In distance learning, pedagogic structures are formed using a range of technical and electronic media and different generations of provision can be identified”* (p. 12- 13).

An outstanding description of the distance learner, where we can locate our participant Susana Gómez, in a significant part of her life when she becomes a professional teacher, is given by White in the following lines, which can enlighten the possible challenges and obstacles that Alejandra faced, when she started her studies at the bachelor in EFL:

Prior experiences of conventional classroom learning do not automatically equip distance learners with the skills and self-knowledge required to tackle the new demands of the distance language learning context. They must regulate and oversee the rate and direction of their learning to a much greater degree than classroom learners whose learning is organised by regular classroom sessions. They must also give attention to establishing their own set of learning behaviours and to shaping and managing the course of their learning... Working within technology-mediated distance language learning contexts requires special, and often new, skills on the part of learners. These learners need to make their own internal adjustments to what is a new context for language learning, while also learning to use the new technologies (2003, p. 23).

As one of the key categories of this project appears to be Distance Education, it is fundamental to analyze how the participant of this narrative describes her experiences when learning and teaching through Distance Education, comparing them later with these parameters established in the theory. To confirm if some of the difficulties have already been resolved by new trends in these type of teaching methodologies or if they remain. As the case of Susana is a successful one, it is important to observe how she could overcome the obstacles she might have faced, or if this chosen type of education provided the sufficient support that a bachelor student requires to achieve the goals in terms of learning, performance, research training, language proficiency, and in excelling in all the necessary skills to actually obtain their bachelor degree and become a language teacher. Some of these are summarized in the following description of White:

Distance learners generally have more opportunities than they would in a teacher-directed classroom to choose what and how they learn. They also have more freedom to determine the kinds and combinations of tasks they work on and to ignore activities or sections of the materials that they do not consider to be personally useful for the development of their TL skills...

Distance language learning has some similarities with resource-based approaches to language learning, but also differs significantly from self-access learning. Distance language learning opportunities are not usually fixed in a particular physical location, and they are based around a course of study, with a cohort of learners. Interaction with teachers and learners is mediated by some form of technology, and there is an increasing emphasis on communication and collaborative learning opportunities (2003, p. 26).

Teacher Susana Gómez as the main character of this narrative provided us with an advantage in counting with her collaboration, and the chance to work based on her particular voice in this narrative. Her life story is relevant in her role not only as English Teacher at VUAD, her current performance; but also as a graduate student of the B.A program. This means, that we have the perspective not only from the teacher that she represents in the present time, but with the student she was in the past, who can enlighten our study with her reflections and descriptions of particular learning experiences of the past, in the same context of Distance Education. Even further, parting from the language learning experiences that previously on the development of her personal life led her to the career in EFL teaching in a Colombian context. The scope of this study becomes wider through the participant's collaboration and her consent to share her own

name, her experiences and life-stories which enrich the reflections that emerged in this project on pedagogical aspects, in English learning and teaching processes.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design corresponds to narrative inquiry. The methodological procedure takes theoretical aspects and principles from Barkhuizen, G., and Wette, R., (2008). As an example, it is being taken a study conducted on a Chinese University that focused the process of data collection through narrative frames. The authors state that the use of narrative frames allows researchers to collect specific information as doing narrative and gathering the voices of its participants. It is important to highlight the methodological contributions done by Barkhuizen and others, who revisit the proposal of using frames for collecting data in a research project, explaining that narrative inquiry is an approach that aims to “*understand these experiences from the perspective of those who experience them*” (2014, p. 13).

A. Narrative Inquiry

The following authors, gives relevant clues about following a narrative research design, especially when Barkhuizen, (2014) reflects on the type of analysis and the aspects which should be considered when collecting and analyzing data from narratives and life-stories: the form, the content or the context... to finally suggest that the frame design, “*should embed contextual cues to enrich the spatiotemporal dimensions of the narrative (...) and in addition it is up to the researcher to consider macro socio-political contexts during the process of analysis*” (2014, p. 13). After a detailed description of strengths and limitations of the use of narrative frames, it was important to outstand how Barkhuizen (2014) clarified that they work as exploratory, preliminary or integrated with other data-collection methods that are compatible with them, which surely we are going to use in this particular study, such as qualitative interviews and field notes.

B. Data Collection Instruments.

In terms of data collection instruments, the previous authors and Griffin (2012), suggest a few samples from the qualitative research tradition such as: Interviews and Journals, which will be taken into account in the data collection process, as well as the Narrative Frames introduced by Barkhuizen and others (2008 and 2014). Finally, if the events to narrate must be chronologically linked, the meaning of those events and the plot that gives it an explanatory structure to connect them is not quite established in advance until the research happens actually; nevertheless, when the chronology is added, they show narrative. The chart below summarizes and theoretically support the instruments, techniques and purposes that the development of narrative inquiry involve:

Table 1-Data Collection Instruments

INSTRUMENT	TECHNIQUE	PURPOSE
Semi structured Interviews. Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick (2014) states that Atkinson (1998: 41) suggests that “ <i>the less structure a life story interview has, the more effective it will be</i> in achieving the goal of getting the person’s own story in the way, form, and style that the individual wants to tell it in” (p. 41, original emphasis). Interviews defined by Taylor, S.J and Bogdan, R., (2002) as: “flexible, dynamic and open, that suggest face to face encounters between the researcher and the respondent, directed to the comprehension of their perspectives on their lives, experiences and situations” (p. 101).	Based on Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick descriptions, the semi-structured interview “is the most commonly used format in language teaching and learning research.” (2014, p. 17). The interviewer uses an interview guide with pre-set questions as “a resource that can be drawn on in whatever way and to whatever extent is appropriate” (Richards, 2003: 69). Here it is important to clarify that the interviews of this story will gather data based on the life-story episodes and the teacher’s experiences.	To apply semi-structured interviews using interview guides as resources to direct the interviews, but allowing the participant to elaborate develop themes, for the narratives sake. To connect the interview questions with the purpose of the interview, as a way to guarantee the necessary elements to develop the narratives.
Data Transcription Nekvapil (2003) showed that interviewing language doesn’t make a difference. In many studies, the	Citing Barkhuizen (2014) “Interviews with bi- or multilingual interviewees, it is not uncommon	The same author states that content and thematic analysis of narrative gives

interviewers share the same linguistic backgrounds with the interviewees, thus allowing the possibility of bilingual interviewing. When interviewing bilingual or multilingual interviewees, researchers usually start by asking interviewees what their preference is regarding the language of the interview” (Barkhuizen, 2014. p. 26).	for the interviewees to code-mix or code-switch. Although transcription depends on the aims and purposes of the study” (p. 27). The same is expected to happen here.	relevance to the experiences and reflections that take place on the life-story selected, and not in oral or written- linguistic details that are part of other fields of study and language research.
Narrative Frames In narrative inquiry, frames guide the researcher to collect specific data depending on the objectives and the emerging aspects or findings of field work. According to Barkhuizen the design of frames guide the researcher towards the key points that emerge as collecting data of the LLHs –Language Learning Histories- (p. 48).	Barkhuizen (2014) recommends from his article titled “Revisiting Narrative Frames: an instrument for investigating language teaching and learning”, that after making interviews it is necessary to elaborate narrative frames to go in depth with emerging from categories.	To have the participant writing down and reflecting on her own life-story, around her learning and teaching English experiences, for the construction of the narrative.

Based on Barhuizen, Benson & Chick (2014).

C. The Role of the Researcher in Narrative Inquiry

It has been observed a trend in assigning the proper importance to the voices of the participants in these types of studies. In one hand, Connelly, M. and Clandinin, J (1990) explain how narrative inquiry names the structured quality of the experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. Here the narrative is both the phenomenon and method, also the story is the phenomenon and the narrative is the design or methodology to develop the inquiry (p. 2). For them, the **negotiation of entry** highlights the way narrative inquiry occurs within ethical relationships among researchers and practitioners, constructed as a caring community (p. 3-4).

My role as researcher is to listen, register, observe and collaborate in the construction of the narrative based on the participant's life story, in relationship to her experiences on language learning and teaching, especially her current practice as a distance educator. Later on, after the raw data are filtered and analyzed, the next step is to conduct a narrative analysis based on the guidelines that as researchers we already have, based on previous investigative experiences and in the models provided by the main author of reference Gary Barkhuizen (2014), and his approach to narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research. Finally, with the support of a software for qualitative data analysis (N-Vivo), the idea is to establish the recurrences, categories and nodes that arise from the instruments applied, with the purpose to consolidate clearer arguments and conclusions on this narrative study.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Thematic Approach

This thematic analysis involved “*repeated reading of the data, coding and categorization of the data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings*”. (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chick, 2014, p. 75). The first two general themes were selected prior to the study, due to the researcher interests in the context of the Research Mentorship Program and the Bachelor in EFL, meanwhile the third one emerged during the data collection stage as a noticeable aspect in the participant's narrative. These themes are: 1. *English Learning*, 2. *English Teaching* and 3. *Distance Education*. The purpose was to find evidence of each one of these in the analyzed narrative accounts. Based on the instruments described before, an initial product obtained after the analysis participant's life-story is the following chart, which includes an adaptation of the established themes and the one that emerged during the research process:

Table 2 - Themes and corresponding Sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. English Learning Experiences	1.1 Learner's attitudes towards English as a foreign language.
	1.2 Facing the breaking down and contrasts between English teaching methodologies.
	1.3 Reflecting upon the English proficiency level.
	1.4 Being a pre-service English teacher in the context of Distance Education.
2. English Teaching Experiences	2.1 The first English teaching experience as a non-professional teacher.
	2.2 From a novice English teacher to a professional teacher.
	2.3. Professional positioning as an English teacher – prestige.
3. Distance Education features that portray the English teacher.	3.1 Finding distance education suitable to grow up professionally.
	3.2. Understanding the implications of Distance Education.
	3.3. The profile of an English Teacher in Distance Education.

B. Participant's Learning/Teaching Time Line

To start this thematic analysis, it is important to establish a general guide that help the reader to locate the participant's life main episodes, which shaped her language learning and teaching experiences, and that permit to portray her as a professional nowadays with all the specific features. Parting from her own narrative about her life, basically in terms of the relationship she had with the foreign language (L2) in different moments, the following timeline is chronologically set, and also organized taking into account the three main stages that characterized the participant's life: Prior to being a bachelor on EFL student, while being a pre-service teacher and now that she has become a professional language teacher.

Table 3 - Timeline, extracted from the participant's narratives.

Stage 1			
Susana's life as a language learner before being a pre-service teacher	<u>...up to 2000</u> Preschool and Primary in a private school in " <u>Liceo San Mateo</u> " in Candelaria La Nueva. Bogotá.	<u>2001- 2006</u> High School in a Public School: " <u>El Japón</u> " in Bogotá. Since 9th Grade: English Course at: " <u>Centro Electrónico de Idiomas</u> "	<u>2007</u> Degree obtained a year after High School Graduation: " <u>Técnico Ocupacional en Inglés</u> ". Starts studying Business Administration in INCAP.
Stage 2			
Susana's life as a university student and pre-service teacher and a school's teacher	<u>2007-2008</u> Obtained a Certificate in Translation in Gran Colombia University, in agreements with Oxford University- One year.	<u>2008</u> <i>Started to work as an English Teacher in an Institute.</i> <u>2009</u> <i>Quits Business Administration Carrier.</i>	<u>2010</u> Starts Bachelor on English as a Foreign Language at Santo Tomás University- Distance Modality. While working as English Teacher.
Stage 3			
Susana's life as a professional teacher and a Master's learner	<u>2016</u> Obtained the Bachelor Degree on EFL at Santo Tomás University. Always studying/working as English Teacher in Institutes and Schools.	<u>2017/2018</u> Master Degree in UNINI University- One in Applied Linguistics (In Mexico). Distance Modality.	<u>2017/2018</u> Master Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Puerto Rico). Distance Modality.

The data analysis was conducted based on the extracts from the following narratives: **A. Preliminary Frame –PF- B. Oral Semi-structured Interview 1, in English- SI #1- and C. Oral Semi-structured Interview 2, in Spanish- SI #2.** (See in the appendix the Table 4 with the Themes and corresponding sub-themes, with all the supporting narrative excerpts in English and Spanish).

C. Thematic Analysis

1. English Learning Experiences

1.1 Learner's attitudes towards English as a foreign language.

In this initial theme, it is observed that the learning process of the Susana Gómez, our participant, throughout her life was described as autonomous and responsible, with some important aspects such as self-monitoring and teamwork. In terms of attitudes as an emergent subtheme at this first level, the participant insisted on the same statement: *she did not like English*, and: she was 'forced' to learn it. The emphasis on the attitude evidences a notorious

change that took place later, comparing that initial response to the foreign language (L2) with her current experiences with it, now that it is part of her academic and working life, we can say that the participant went beyond just liking English, to the point of teaching it.

*I was **forced**, because my father told me that I had to decide to do a different activity apart from the studying sessions at school, and he told me: you can study English or Systems... so I had to decide the other thing that was English. **I didn't like English**... It was a challenge, because **I didn't like English**. SI #1.1*

*I started my classes there and it was really, really, really nice, so I started **to like** that subject. SI #1.2*

In this case, it is possible to hear the voice of the learner from the perspective of the current teacher, now that the participant is aware of what went wrong while she was trying to learn English at school which cause that initial dislike paraphrasing it: the words had no context and the tasks seemed meaningless. These views on learning and teaching affected significantly her attitudes towards the L2 as she reflects on what actually she did not like: the way he had been taught the L2 so far.

The recurrence of expressions that connect with this first Theme: Experiences with Language Learning on the Susana's part, continues throughout her discourse as an important factor that marks the relationship with the subject matter: English. It is observable how these attitudes and feelings are not static but dynamic, they move according to the stimuli and the particular contrast between: the external influences on the learner and their intrinsic motivations, views and consequent actions. The tension among these multiple forces that affect the life of a language learner, generate different results of either: overcoming the difficulties or succumbing to them; but always moving forward in one's life path as successfully as possible. Attitudes, reflections and decisive role taking appear in the narrative as major factors which determine academic and working development in a person's life-story.

To conclude this initial topic of attitudes and emotions, there were some insights from Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick (2014) when describing some features of narrative inquiry in the approach of thematic analysis, as they state: *The thematic analysis conducted by the researchers revealed varying degrees of student identification with imagined communities. Following is an excerpt from the LLH of a student who lacked an imagined community with which to identify and*

ended up hating learning English” (p. 88). The participant Susana Gómez also claimed to hate English and being forced to learn that L2, after some reflection on her own narrative she clarifies that what she did not like was the way she was being taught the second language. In the other hand, Tomilson (2010) mentions some important characteristics in terms of language learning, and in Susana Gomez’s case these principles might be applicable, as it remarks the change from being frustrated and not liking L2 as a school subject, to become an encouraged English Teacher and Researcher.

Feeling enjoyment, pleasure and happiness, feeling empathy, being amused, being excited and being stimulated are most likely to influence acquisition positively but feeling annoyance, anger, fear, opposition and sadness is more useful than feeling nothing at all” (Tomlinson, 2010a, p. 89). *This is true of learners’ responses to the content of what they are reading, writing, listening to or saying but the emotions stimulated by the self-access learning experience need to be positive and pleasurable* (Hurd, 2008). (p.74)

Because of my experience too... I had in my mind that I didn’t want to make the same mistakes that the teachers made. SI #1.12

1.2 Facing the breaking down and contrasts between English teaching methodologies.

Paradoxically, the positive experiences with the English language in the participant’s life, did not take place at her school but at an Institute of informal education. The contrast between teaching methodologies she was exposed to, reveals how the obstacles the participant faced in her learning process of English at school, relied on the fact that it was a race on vocabulary acquisition, in abstract, not functional in terms of identifying the usefulness of the language.

I was good at it, but I didn’t like my classes. Maybe the context, maybe the way the teacher presented to me that subject in the school. Because it was: just vocabulary, just list of words and that’s it. We didn’t have like a context to apply those words - SI #1.3

I have to say that all the teachers were so good in teaching, not only in the language, but in teaching. SI #1.4

I could understand that I was going to use English for a specific purpose or for a meaningful purpose, not like a list of words. SI #1.5

In the second interview, the participant expressed:

*Cada día **sigo aprendiendo** y hay momentos en los que sí me he sentido frustrada incluso en la Licenciatura, momentos en que decía: Dios mío no entiendo eso... me está yendo mal en “SPEAKING”, tengo que mejorarlo; pero creo que es esto, tal vez como me han mostrado el lenguaje, la forma en que me lo han enseñado me han hecho enamorarme de la lengua.*

Cuando yo estaba en el colegio, en primaria, en bachillerato, pues me hablaban de aprenderse un vocabulario apréndase el vocabulario y no más, entonces para mí el QUIZ de inglés era aprenderse 5 verbos en presente, pasado y futuro... y realmente pues no me mostraban la función del lenguaje. Cuando yo ya vi que eso que me estaban enseñando realmente lo podía a usar en un contexto, entonces aprendí que: oiga vea, esto sí me está gustando, puedo decir esto de ésta forma o de la otra, entonces creo que ahí, fue cuando empezó todo. SI #2.1

Another analysis in this regard, relates to the fact of how life experiences with the L2 affect the willingness to invest in this new language learning or not. Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick (2014) call these particular experiences ‘incidents’ which generate a given effect, depending on the case.

*Often, experiences lead to de-investing in learning, for instance, when students achieve poor grades or are criticized by their teachers. However, other incidents have the opposite effect, encouraging learners to identify themselves more readily as English users... Murphey, et al. (2004) argue that **critical incidents** such as these can create investments in learning. Further investment may occur as a result of learners’ metacognitive awareness of their own learning gained through the process of writing their LLHs. Doing the writing means the learners are reflecting on who they are as learners, what contributes to and inhibits their learning, and how they can best progress in the future (p. 39).*

In the case of Susana, she did not dream to be like her school English teachers, but exactly the opposite: NOT to be like them, but more like the teachers at the informal education institute, who seemed to have fun and not only master the language but the pedagogy for teaching it. A series of **critical incidents**, part of the learning and teaching experiences made the participant to increase her investment in EFL learning, from courses, to university to master degrees levels, as observed in the narrative excerpts and its analysis.

1.3 Reflecting upon the English proficiency level.

This is a crucial moment for an L2 teacher or pre-service teacher (Student of a professional bachelor degree in EFL), when there is an awareness of the personal proficiency level, especially

if we have been pointed out about possible weaknesses. In the following excerpts, this subtheme was evidenced in Susana's narrative, as she pointed out that she did not have the high English level she thought she had, literally. That awareness, made the participant increase the efforts on acquiring the necessary skills and competences in the L2. A need to improve was logical, due to the academic requirements of her new teaching training (the Bachelor on EFL), but also it was the continuation of a process that had begun years ago during the encounter she had with the L2 in the Institute. Here, it is visible the constant interest on improving at what she pursued: to speak English.

I decided to move to Bogotá because I liked the Tutoring Sessions here... it was a better experience for me but more demanding. I had to study a lot, I had to, maybe sacrifice some other spaces of my personal life, to start improving my English, because I knew at that time, that I didn't have the high level I thought I had. SI #1.6 (Added emphasis)

In the second interview, the participant stated:

Afortunadamente siempre me ha gustado indagar mucho, entonces a pesar que antes tenía las clases presenciales y tenía la posibilidad de practicar, igual estaba buscando con quien practicar más. Algo que me pasó y creo que a mis compañeros con los que estudiaba aquí en la licenciatura es que, hicimos un grupo de estudio, entonces eso fue muy interesante... eso fue iniciativa de nosotros. SI #2.2

1.4 Being a pre-service English teacher in the context of Distance Education.

When Susana becomes a pre-service teacher, or student of the Bachelor on EFL at Santo Tomás University, she describes several characteristics of being a distance student. One of these aspects is that: studying in distance modality is not as easy as the participant thought it was going to be, given the flexibility that it claims to have, as we can observe at the end of the second excerpt. The analysis leads to the reflection that: yes, it has valuable advantages which permitted the participant, with all her particular circumstances to study there. However, at the same time, there are important *challenges* such as: time management, autonomy, deadlines, etc. that the distance student must face and be trained to manage them, in order to actually succeed.

When I was studying my 4th Semester of Administration I decided to finish with that, because my father was asking me, well: “You have to change from University, you need to study in a good University”, so having that in mind... when I had the opportunity to work in another place, I was like: I’m not going to force my dad to pay a lot of money if I’m not going to continue with this. So, at that time I started studying here at the university... I started there my Bachelor on EFL, and I finished it! SI #1.7

I was still living in Villavicencio and I started studying there, in CAU Villavicencio... but I had one tutoring session here in Bogotá because I traveled to visit my family, so I took the decision to have tutoring sessions here. That was totally different, the perspective was so different having classes there and having classes here in Bogotá, on Saturdays. And when I started this first semester I could evidence that, I mean, you have to be so autonomous, you have to read a lot, and it was not that easy. SI #1.8

In the second interview, the participant said:

Cuando empecé a buscar dónde estudiar, yo necesitaba un lugar... más que pensar en la parte académica, pues yo en ese momento no dimensionaba como tal tantos aprendizajes que iba tener. Sino más bien como, yo voy hacer profesora, ya había tenido la experiencia y quiero cualificar esto, pero necesitaba un lugar primero que me diera tiempo para estudiar, para trabajar y que pudiera estar con mi bebé. Yo pienso que esa fue la primera expectativa que se cumplió. SI #2.3

Another key aspect was the search for *collaborative work* with study partners, which might seem a whole challenge at the distance modality of education, as students usually engage in *asynchronous distance learning* (See: Figure 1). Nevertheless, the possibility of forming *groups of study and discussion* was a key factor in the learning process of the participant, as she states it mainly in the second interview. Social interaction that comes natural in face to face learning spaces, appears also crucial in the context of distance education as revealed in the narrative. This necessity of the distance student, was remarked by the participant as part of their particular developed skills for learning, in this modality, in a context where the risk of isolation becomes a trend that teachers and programs try to fight against, in the particular case of Susana: a successful learning process. Later on, in her mother tongue the participant confirmed her view on the themes explained above:

Se creó la necesidad de buscar otras personas. En la parte presencial uno tiene sus compañeros de clase, se puede hablar con ellos. Sin embargo aquí el reto era contactarlos y que realmente

persistiera esa comunicación. Y eso nos ayudó muchísimo. En total sí cambian muchísimo los métodos de estudio, porque uno pues en la parte presencial deja las dudas para hacérselas al docente, y aquí uno a veces es “será que le pregunto al profesor, o mejor yo busco primero”, porque uno siente la necesidad y la obligación de buscar antes de preguntar. SI #2.4

Cuando yo ingresé al campo específico, no solamente viendo inglés, sino las materias de pedagogía en inglés se abrió la visión de lo que era la licenciatura de lo que yo iba a ser como docente y más que las expectativas que yo tenía previas, empecé a ser mucho más crítica: qué era lo que necesitaba, y definitivamente poco a poco uno empieza a ver: bueno necesitamos esto... Yo era de las que me tenían ahí en la oficina Vivian, la directora del programa, y yo iba a hacer peticiones como tal, como cuáles... primero que necesitábamos exámenes internacionales, yo en ese momento sentía la necesidad que quiero saber en qué nivel estoy... eso lo empezamos a ver entre todos. SI #2.5 (Added emphasis)

2. English Teaching Experiences

2.1 The first English teaching experience as a non-professional teacher.

The “*strange experience*” Susana Gómez mentions when first entering a classroom with a different role now: ‘the teacher’, can be assumed as the feeling someone faces when an important life change is about to take place. A major change in her life path was about to occur, and it can be analyzed at several levels in terms of the English Teaching Experiences theme.

Some particular situations in the participant’s life, led her to these English Teaching Experiences. First of all, there was the desire of financial independence from the family, then moving out from home to another city by making profit of an acquired knowledge: the English language. These step by step experiences match with the surprising encounter with her life vocation: Teaching English. It was clear after quitting her previous studies in Business Administration and the probabilities to make a living out of that career, how she ended up trading it for a teaching job at an institute.

The description of a specific phenomenon took place in the narrative: A person is hired as English Teacher due to the fact that he/she knows the language, without any specific training in pedagogy. It is an issue which evidences a significant source of real life workers, which domain a subject matter but not the teaching theory or didactics of that subject matter per se, and the

results of these type of phenomena can vary greatly, as in the case of the participant: in an observed necessity to obtain teaching training, as in a bachelor degree on EFL.

I was living here in Bogotá, but then I had the opportunity to start working... in Villavicencio. So I moved there and in that place I had the possibility to start working as a teacher even though I had not studied my bachelor yet. SI #1.9

At that time, I think that was the first motivation that I had, and noticing that as soon as I entered to the classroom everything was like... I don't know, I don't know how to express it... I was ready to do it. I started giving the classes, giving the materials... that was natural and in every single class I could evidence that, it makes me happy. SI #1.10

2.2 From a novice English teacher to a professional teacher.

In the different contexts where the participant had her initial teaching practices: with adults, teenagers, children, small groups or larger groups, private or public institutions, etc. She reaffirms the desire to be a teacher empowered by her teaching experiences to overcome the possible difficult conditions faced during these first years of her practice, due to her lack of experience -and in this case, lack of studies too-. Every obstacle instead of demotivating the participant, seemed to encourage her to move forward.

It was a strange experience for me because I was here in Bogotá studying Business Administration and then because I knew how to speak English, one person said: maybe you could help me with a group of students in my Institute; and I said yes.”- SI #1.11

Because of my experience too... I had in my mind that I didn't want to make the same mistakes that the teachers made. SI #1.12

In Villavicencio I had the opportunity also to work in a Bilingual School... I had like 16 students, 12 students; but here (in Bogotá) ... I worked in a public school with 40 - 50 students in a classroom, it was a totally different experience for me; but I think, when I started working in those conditions, I believed that I was making what I love to do, so it was good. SI #1.13

Another key factor observed in these interviews, is that the point of view of ‘the English Teacher’ suffered a meaningful transformation. The way Susana describes her teachers in her School experiences to her university experiences contrasts with the way she describes them in

the university context, when becoming a pre-service teacher at Universidad Santo Tomás. First of all, the participant emphasized in how she did not want to make the same mistakes her primary or high school teachers made when trying to teach her the L2. Second of all, the participant criticizes some of the co-workers she had when she started working in schools (public and/or private-bilingual schools), who used to do the same thing over and over for a long time, avoiding innovation in terms of didactics or technology uses for teaching L2.

Finally, when she describes her university language teachers the opposition is notorious, as she described them as updated teachers, who arrived to the face to face sessions with relevant data. All of these topics arise in the narrative, and give shape to the vision of the ‘language teacher’, their ‘dos and don’ts’; and all of this modelling together with the readings, theory and training on the subject matter, portrays the characteristics of a distance education language learner and teacher.

Mis docentes de la licenciatura, ellos se esmeraban por aprender algo más siempre, por llegar al salón de clases con información actualizada. Eso también me impactó a mí porque yo me he dado cuenta, profesoras con las que he trabajado en otros colegios que han durado 6 años en el mismo curso, y yo decía bueno, un profesor seis años en 2do grado... y me podía dar cuenta que era exactamente lo mismo, las mismas guías de toda la vida... definitivamente teníamos que cambiar. Yo me he dado cuenta que a muchas docentes se les daba la opción de escoger y ellas seguían en el mismo curso, no querían cambiar y eso fue algo diferente que vi en la licenciatura, cómo día a día hay algo nuevo, hay que indagar, hay que buscar a veces quisiera tener más tiempo para hacerlo porque sé que lo necesito más. SI #2.6

Tenía primaria, casi siempre me tocaba con los más grandes: Cuarto, Quinto, a veces Primero o Segundo grado, y una vez se fue la profe de preescolar y fue como: “...Debes dictar inglés en preescolar” y eso fue traumático para mí. Duré como un mes y dije no más, porque bueno... yo sentía que no estaba preparada, que no tenía el suficiente conocimiento pedagógico para darle a ellos, además fue iniciando la carrera entonces siempre era como: ¿qué hago, qué les llevo? Fue complicado, creo que en este momento pensaría mucho mejor las cosas, como te decía es conocer mejor a los estudiantes, qué les puedo hacer a ellos, qué dinámicas trabajan mejor, qué estrategias se pueden usar, creo que eso es muy importante. SI #2.7

2.3 Professional positioning as an English teacher- Prestige.

A description of the participant's journey working as an English teacher, was extracted from the Preliminary Frame (PF), which is given here to summarize this subtheme of English Teaching experiences, her professional growth which moved forward with time. This description, does not only reveal her past experiences as a non-professional, but it is observable a meaningful advance in terms of positioning and prestige, and how the teaching training process has not even stopped yet, but it continues nowadays.

I started to work as an English Teacher in an Institute back in 2008, there I was in charge with the basic level adults group, at that time I had not begun my professional career on EFL, however I had taken an English Course at "Centro Electrónico de Idiomas" for 2 years. Being there, I had the opportunity to travel to Villavicencio in a branch of the Institute, and then I was hired to work in a bilingual school called: Neil Armstrong School, where I taught Math and Science in English to first grade kids, where I had 20 students under my tutoring. It was at that point where I decided to change of career, because I was studying Business Administration before, simultaneously I got a Diploma on Texts Translation which allowed me to be even more confident about studying the Bachelor degree. PF-1.1

After that experience and having finished my career, I worked in another institute full time, where I taught my classes in the Basic, Intermediate and Advance levels, to children, adolescents and adults. Once I graduated from the Bachelor in EFL program at Universidad Santo Tomás (VUAD.), it was opened an announcement for working as English teacher in the programs from VUAD (Vicerrectoría de la Universidad Abierta y a Distancia), I ran and was hired by the University in the year 2015, it is my current job, I am a Distance Teacher in the Faculty of Education and Science and Technology for Cross English 4 (This is the last q level of English that take the students in the programs), in this course I may have 200 students per semester at the national level. PF-1.2

During the interviews, the participant retold her life journey to become a professional language teacher, with all the implication of phenomena such as: changing of life path –career-, and also the jump from just taking training courses to improve her proficiency in the L2, to a process of advanced levels of teaching training in her Masters Degrees on Applied Linguistics

and EFL Teaching. This jump is not random, it is the result of a transformation process which took years of study and working experience that led the participant to an awareness: to excel her teaching skills, she cannot stop learning.

When I finished my high school I entered to study Administration and I studied in INCAP. And well, when I finished my 2nd semester, I finished the English Course. And then I had the opportunity to do a Certificate in Translation in Gran Colombia University, with Oxford University too, one year. SI #1.14

I am doing 2 masters. The first one is LINGUISTICA APLICADA, and the other one is TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE... one is from Mexico, the other is in Puerto Rico... both are virtual, 100% virtual. I love studying that way... it is better for me. I do not imagine me studying in face to face sessions again. SI #1.15

3. Distance Education features that portray the English teacher.

3.1 Finding distance education suitable to grow up professionally.

There was an emergent theme in the narrative: Distance Education. It came up during the analysis of the participant's story as a key factor in her life. She was far away from her parents' home in Bogotá and living by herself now in another town: Villavicencio. Her path to financial and personal independence came along with another factor, she became a mom. As a working mother, who had decided not to continue the business administration studies she was supposed to take initially, her timing possibilities to continue with a conventional career, that involved attending synchronous classes under strict schedules did not seem plausible. Nevertheless, the participant had a clear objective: to become a professional language teacher. At this crucial life point, Susana finds a suitable methodology for her particular needs and interests: Distance Education at Santo Tomás University, which had an extension in the town of her current location at the time, Villavicencio.

I needed a methodology which helped me with continuing working, but also being a mom, and all those responsibilities that I had, so I started looking for a methodology which help with that. Studying at night would be a difficult thing because of my baby so, I searched in the web and found this University... I started looking for information about how was the studying distance method'. At the beginning all people are saying that it is easy, because you just need to present

some papers... So, I took the decision to do it, but when I started I think that first semester was a challenge for me... you have to be so autonomous, you have to read a lot, and it was not that easy. SI #1.16

3.2 Understanding the implications of Distance Education (D.E.).

The specific circumstances that led the participant to decide to study with this D.E. modality, which was not as 'easy' as she thought initially based on what she had heard about it, as she states: it was more demanding than expected. Nevertheless, this factor did not discourage her but made her persevere and even change again her dwelling to Bogotá, in order to find other perspectives, based on what she considered 'quality support' for the tutoring sessions of the Bachelor on EFL courses. This geographical re-location evidences that the participant was moving to the places where she considered there were more opportunities for her personal and professional development.

I know that the teacher is a guide that it is necessary to talk with them to ask them many different things, they are so important... but YOU need to take the main role in this methodology (D.E.) as a student. I mean, maybe the only thing that I started thinking in a different form is the way that the teacher works in this methodology, but not the learning process. - SI #1.17

Being a teacher demands to think in the students. I mean, I know that maybe face to face education it is the same, but you were not aware... or maybe you are not so aware about that when you need to think in that, but without the students in front of you... At the beginning that was my perception: I know how to do that, being a Distance Education tutor, because I know how to upload a file in a Virtual Room, I know the technical part, I was ready. But when you sit in front of the computer, and when you need to think about it as a teacher, not as a student. That is a huge responsibility. SI #1.18

To contextualize the teaching... maybe you can place a lot of resources in the Virtual Room, you can put, I don't know, 10 videos about English or whatever. But if you don't contextualize that, the students are not going to get that in a good way. They are just going to think: "Ok I am going to watch that video", but it is not going to be meaningful for them; but, when they start seeing those videos... they start thinking that those resources are for them... those resources were made for them, not because I found them in the Web and just posted them at the Virtual Room. - SI #1.19

In retrospective, let us summarize a description of elements from the previous Themes and Subthemes that make possible to identify in the narrative: crucial factors that portray the professional in language teacher or in any career, as some of these aspects can be generalizable. First of all, there is a constant need of qualification, on what the participant considered valuable and fundamental for academic and working development, which set the determination of pursuing a career.

Once the vocation is found, the next step is to train oneself as best as possible, according to the specific possibilities and circumstances. In the process, a series of new expectations and outcomes may arise, for instance, the participant mentions how these expectations were fulfilled in the simplest thing: she was actually able to study a Bachelor on Education and finish her studies successfully. Is it plausible to say that in some Colombian contexts this appears like quite an accomplishment? Not easy at all? Are these difficulties and obstacles generalizable to certain areas of our urban or rural Colombian contexts? Analyzing only one life-story and its mirroring on the researcher, some challenges were observed in terms of:

- * **Financial support** – working and studying simultaneously.
- * **Family issues**- e.g. becoming a mother, a father, moving away from home, etc.
- * **Limited timing and opportunities**- assuming different roles and responsibilities.
- * **Education as a privilege**- finding the best possible option out of a few.

All of these factors were sorted due to a decision, the selection of a modality which seemed a little bit unknown –*Distance Education at Universidad Santo Tomás*- but it offered the flexibility enough to glimpse the expected academic/working success the participant expected. However, there were new challenges then: a demanding of a high level of autonomy in the learning process, the initial difficulties of contacting other students for collaborative work, the gaps on the communication with tutors/teachers which make reconsider to ask just any question related to the course and try to find the solution by oneself.

Many of these circumstances might seem more “negative” than positive, however, in the case of the participant, they always became opportunities to search for solutions and achieve not only the content learning goals but specific social and personal skills and values such as: autonomy,

courage, hard-work, leadership, research skills, interpersonal intelligence through technological devices, divergent thinking, becoming a problem solver in general... Are not these some of the XXI century required skills? Virtual spaces for learning, in the case of the participant combined with face to face sessions, were a good formula for different types of pursued goals in the participant life.

Decisions end up being crucial in a teacher's life path. In this case, it is observable a special circumstance (a job offering) due to the participant's knowledge of the English Language. That became a key episode which determined her future career choice on EFL teaching, parting from the 'empirical' working experience. A reflection about this life path is that the use of English as a Foreign Language could be strictly academic at the beginning, to become part of a person's life later on: for enjoyment, for working or touristic spaces, etc.

The participant had found herself "*forced*" to study a language from a different country and culture at an early stage of her life, and that would turn useful for her former career: Business Administration; but years later, in the change of role: from student to teacher, English was still central in her life, also in spaces that are not socially or naturally emerged but just academically relevant –classrooms-, however there is a twist now: The participant became part of that group –educators- that wants to make the L2 real and practical for other people -students-, by motivating them to learn it and make it part of their lives too.

3.3 The profile of an English Teacher in Distance Education.

The narrative of the participant describes some key features to define EFL teacher in the context of Distance Education: First of all, they need to be aware of the necessity to analyze the context, the characteristics and needs of the learner's population. The teacher needs to be trained in skills that let them to identify these factors before designing their teaching unit or course. The constant qualification mentioned before, cannot stay at the level of the knowledge of the subject matter (L2), but it needs to transcend to the domain of the pedagogical skills that permits them to identify the best methodologies and materials to implement in their practice.

Many things changed in my perspectives, in my routines, in the way that I perceived the teaching process, in the way I understand that you, as a teacher, need to present in a Virtual Room, many

resources, many methodologies... methods, or approaches to make your students learn. And to think that you have like 200, 300 students in different places, that they have had different experiences with the language process. But you need just to construct ONE Virtual Room for them. SI #1.20

I really have to say that it is so good when you have the opportunity to work in the virtual room, to design the materials. But is necessary to have that contact with the students, even if it is going to be virtual, or in face to face sessions. SI #1.21

A suitable way to acquire this theoretical background and pedagogical practice is obtaining a bachelor on EFL, or at least a professional training equivalent to this one. This same process of qualification does not finish at the professional level of a bachelor degree on EFL, although it needs to continue increasing levels and positioning the teacher to higher degrees of education, as in postgraduate studies or master degrees, as it occurs in any other career, as the teacher needs to be upgrading to answer to the demands of the new type of learners he receives every year, semester, month, everyday! The speeds of a globalized environment requires that constant training nowadays.

There's the temptation of not upgrading and remain doing the same for 20 years as the narrative denounces it, however, the negative consequences will be evident. As observed in this life-story, the participant continued studying while teaching, in order to master the areas of her career that will qualify her pedagogical practice in the present and future: Applied Linguistics and EFL teaching, and also improving in research skills to innovate in the knowledge not only obtained from books but from personal research projects.

The participant states that after becoming a distance learner and eventually, a professional English teacher, her view on the learning process remains the same (one which requires autonomy, responsibility, hard work, student as the protagonist, etc.); however, the vision of the teacher and how they work kept suffering transformations. Basically, for Susana Gómez the teacher must be a protagonist of the whole process too, and their role is a key factor for the EFL teaching, and directly: learning, to succeed; especially when the teacher does not have those students in front of them –as in: Distance Education-. Nevertheless, the teacher always needs to think on their learners' needs, interests and specific characteristics; which will give their teaching course identity in combination with the subject matter, and build the conditions to generate

actual learning. In this theme, the participant talks about a series of important aspects that involve English teaching in general, that can be applied to D.E.:

- ✓ Ludic activities and enjoyment of the classes on the learners' part.
- ✓ Create a necessity instead of an imposition on learners.
- ✓ Thinking on the students and groups in advance (their interests, qualities and needs), after a context analysis of the population of learners.

There is a recurrent topic on the participant's narrative, related to how the consequences of not taking these aspects into account during the pedagogical practice might be negative, in the words of Susana some of these consequences are related to the following:

- ❖ A negative attitude toward the L2 at early stages of the learner's life, for instance during school time.
- ❖ Programs and curricula planned in abstract, far away from the realities of the class contexts, which become useless as they do not achieve the learning goals in fact.
- ❖ Difficult teaching experiences, due to the lack of knowledge on the didactics of the subject matter: English Language or the teaching principles that apply according to the learners' age, language level, attention span, cognitive development, etc.

According to the above, there is a significant change of role under this same Theme connected to Distance Education: from being a student to becoming a teacher. Taking into account the general context of distance education in different cities indistinctively, the participant reflects on: how the distance education teachers need to think in advance in all the type of possible students they might find, without having any physical contact with them and having the chance: to read their gestures, facial expressions, level of attention, tones and intentions.

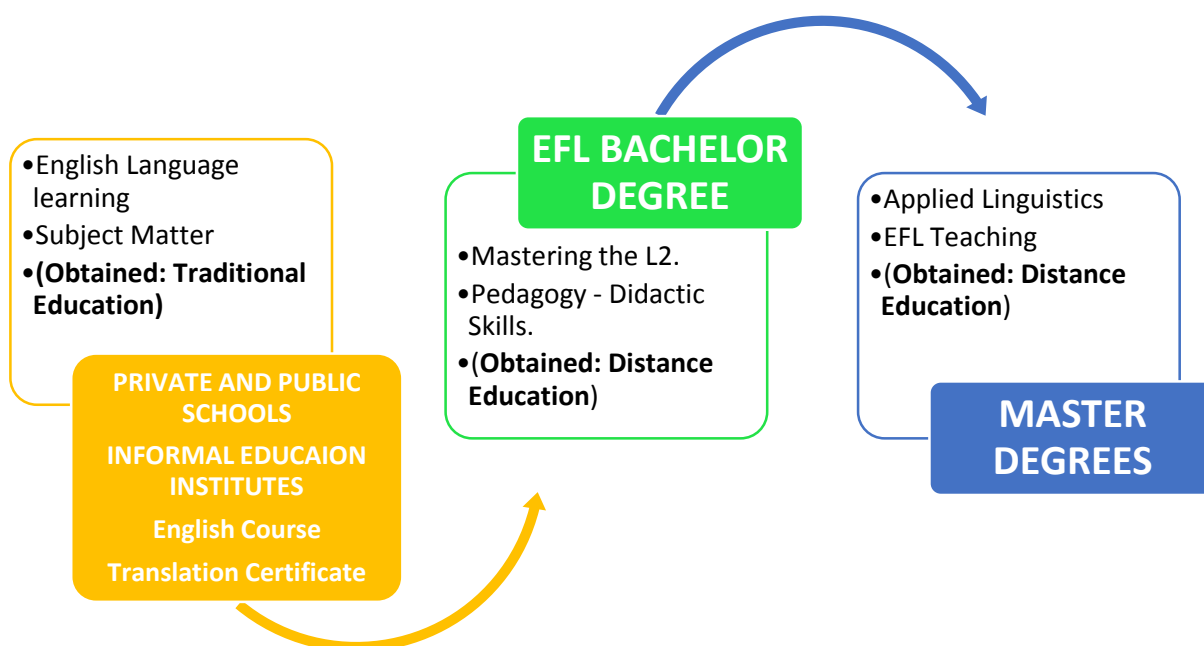
These teachers really need to decentralize their way of thinking and project into the hundreds of students they are going to reach, around the cultural diversity of Colombian or even at international contexts. According to this, there is a particular feature on the distance teacher that the narrative claimed, they require certain abilities that are not guaranteed just after being a

distance modality student. Usually, as professional teacher, one might be so focused in oneself that the general view can be limited, which might be an obstacle to overcome as to increase the possibilities of success once contact with learners is reached, either virtually or in face to face sessions.

I love having tutoring sessions with my students here at the University because is the only opportunity that I have to know them, to know their perceptions about my teaching practice... SI #1.22

Uno tiene a cargo un grupo y debe pensar en que no solamente deben salir muy buenos hablando inglés, sino que desarrollen otras competencias, que sean buenos para estudiar cualquier asignatura, entonces se hacen técnicas de estudio. Yo creo que eso fue lo más importante, aprendí que antes de planear mi currículum, debo saber cuál es mi población con quién estoy trabajando: el contexto, el aprendizaje también se tiene que contextualizar. Entonces no solamente es que voy a enseñar el “pasado simple”, sino cómo yo lo voy a contextualizar a la vida de ellos (los estudiantes)... es muy importante que ellos lo aterricen a su contexto, a sus vivencias. SI #2.8

Figure 3: A Language Teacher Qualification Process- Teacher's Profile.



D. Multimodal Narrative

In this process of portraying the profile of a language teacher, the possibility of a multimodal type of narrative took place during the class observation of the participant. Basically, the idea of ‘multimodal narratives’ as also extracted from Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick (2014), who explain that narratives can be analyzed from different sources such as oral, written or even graphic; these also can be physical or digital according to the chosen instrument to obtain the data. Based on these authors, the definition of multimodal narratives is in the following lines:

We adopt Kress’s definition of mode as that of “culturally and socially produced resources for representation” (2005: 6). Kress gives the examples of image, writing, music, layout, and others as different modes that people use to make and communicate meanings... we consider narratives constructed by more than one mode as multimodal narratives; for instance, written narratives embedded with hyperlinks or photographs, or oral narratives supported or supplemented by photographs... As in studies using oral and written data, multimodal data are produced and collected in different contexts (2014, p. 53).

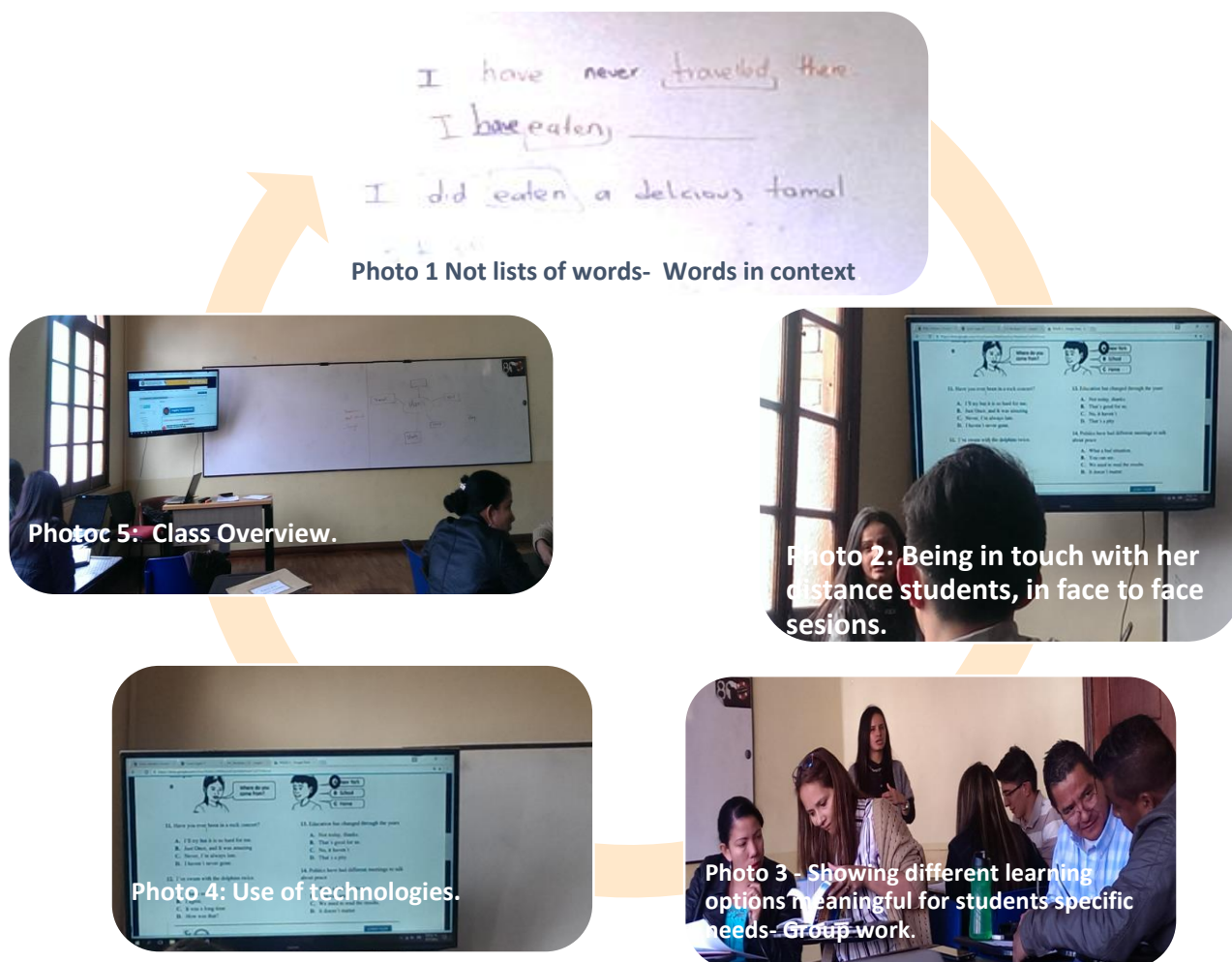
At this point, the analysis integrated multimodal narrative since the observation done in one of her classes, allowed the researcher to take photographs and interpret data about how Susana positioned herself as an English teacher in distance education, as observed in the footnotes, and described in the following lines descriptions:

Photograph #1: Use of L2 words in context, not in lists of words to memorize, but assigning a meaningful use for them in the context of the learner. As in the phrase “eating Tamal”, appropriate for the Colombian context.

Photograph #1: Being in touch with her distance students, in face to face sessions, as the participant claimed she loves the face to face sessions, and have the chance to see how students are managing and processing all the information of the Virtual Room and turning it into actual learning, with the tutor’s support.

Photograph #5: Use of technology is a must, the Distance students are expected to be exposed to the appropriate use of tools and technology devices that will increase their possibilities for learning.

Figure 4: Participant's Practice –Face to face teaching session with distance students.

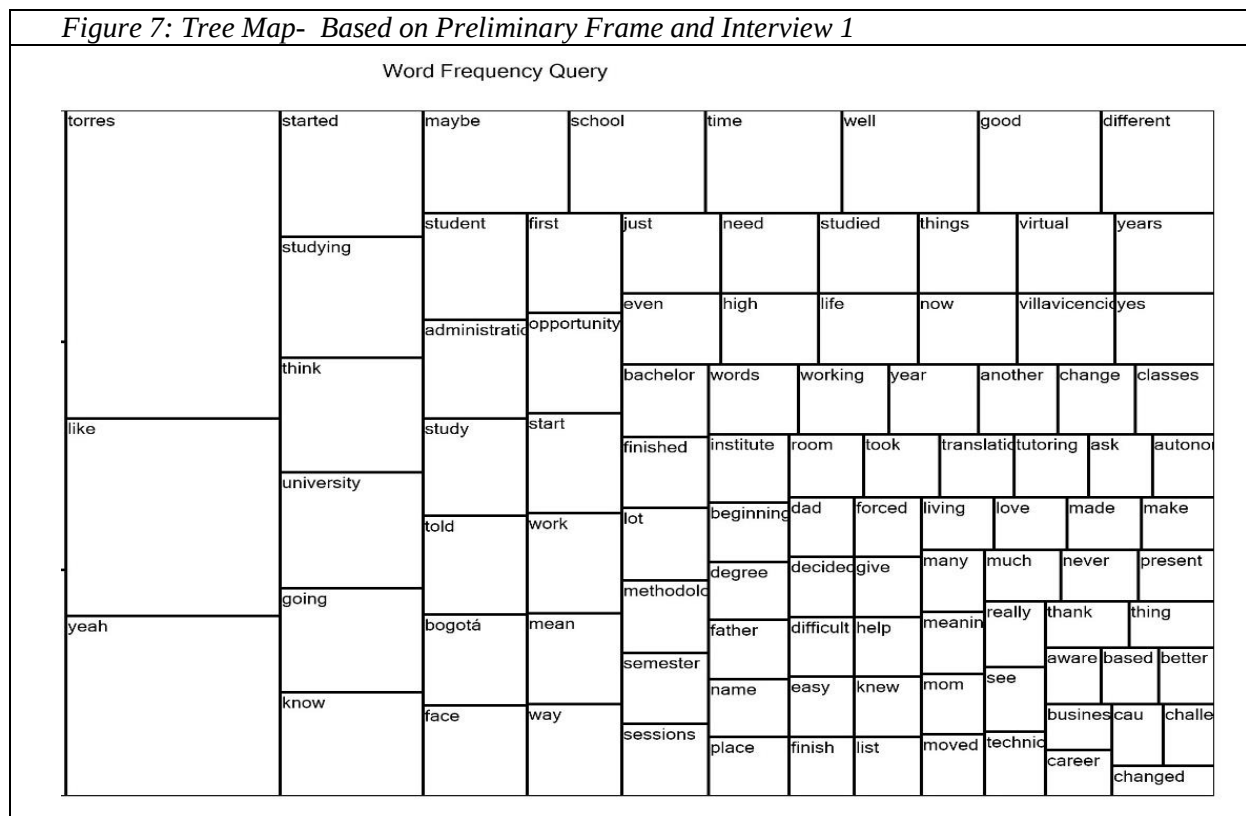


E. Complementary Resource for Data Analysis: N-Vivo

1. Qualitative Analysis: Word Frequency Queries.

These graphs were developed in the qualitative software program “N-Vivo”. The importance of this graphs in the data analysis relies in the fact that they evidence the relevance of some terms in the participant narratives, and in the chart elaborated with the established themes and subthemes, which also contains the selected excerpts from the narratives. The recurrence of certain words shows meaning and when analyzed numerically, they were represented graphically in two Word Clouds and one Tree Map. The size of words were proportioned to their appearance in the narratives: being the biggest words the ones that were mentioned the most by

Figure 7: Tree Map- Based on Preliminary Frame and Interview 1



(Note: The first row with the full name of the participant and the first name of the researcher, was deleted for security)

In the second Word Cloud (Based on the Themes and Subthemes Chart) the ‘biggest’ most recurrent words are ‘*participant*’ and ‘*life*’ as the center of all the narrative, the life-story and experiences that describe language learning and teaching, and around them all the meaningful words that formed the narrative and shape the themes and subthemes categorized, after the narrative analysis. This tool definitely aided in the process of making sense of a person’s discourse, and made easier and proving numerically the recurrence of terms that showed meaning and appeared meaningful in the context of this story.

VI. Conclusions

After conducting this project it is possible to reflect on how a teacher's life and experiences portray English learning and teaching in the context of Distance Education, in this specific narrative: in the context of Universidad Santo Tomás – Bogotá, Colombia. In one hand, going through Susana's narrative permitted the researcher to establish the features of a language teacher, in a particular modality: Distance Education, which can be generalizable as the experiences described are related to real life events and its impact in a teacher's life, and also her students' lives. In the other hand, the participant's profile emerged throughout the narrative in the establishment of themes and subthemes. Here, the characteristics of the distance language student and/or teacher were clearer and clearer as the excerpts were extracted and connected to the themes that had emerged from the narrative, in both her roles at the historical sequence of events highlighted in the life-story.

In summary we found a particular teacher profile: A professional in EFL teaching, with a series of evidenced pedagogical skills in constant search for answers to the educational problems that take place in the social contexts. These answers are found not only through theoretical study –which is fundamental-, but mainly through context analysis and research exercises conducted at different levels: In the Bachelor Degree and in the Master Degrees. A professional in EFL teaching that complete a decade of teaching experience in different moments or stages: Prior to the bachelor degree, while being a pre-service teacher at Universidad Santo Tomás, and of course after becoming a professional language teacher, again: while studying her Master Degrees.

After the previous objective description, other reflections arise as the constant desire of positioning as a professional, advancing in career levels, acquiring social and academic prestige, and of course overcoming all the possible obstacles that might have crossed her way due to personal and familiar issues. There is also evidence in the participant story, of different skills development such as: L2 proficiency, autonomy, cooperative work –in distance educational contexts-, technology use, and the ability to decentralize from oneself and project in the hundreds and thousands of students she is going to have, with the possibility not only to train their linguistic skills, but their metacognitive processes, their personal values, etc.

In terms of **Language Learning Experiences**, there is a key word that characterizes the whole process of the participant which is: transformation. The initial conditions that affect the learning process of a foreign language generate an impact, a negative one; but later on, new environments and new experiences changed significantly the participant's views on language learning, which led her to actually learn the L2! However, the transformation does not stop there, it kept unfolding new desires and expectations which ended up in a role change when talking about language learning: from being the apprentice to being the professor. This new role and position, allowed the participant to be very critic about the circumstances that were obstacles for her L2 learning, in early educational contexts, basically: its lack of usefulness and the never ending-boring lists of words to 'learn'.

In the other hand, as stated by Barkhuizen, Benson and Chick (2014) when describing some Language Learning Histories (LLHs), they outstand a case where there was "*a student who lacked an imagined community with which to identify and ended up hating learning English*" (p. 88). The absence of a sense of meaning and not belonging to a community of L2 users took a toll on the participant, who later on, when studying in an informal education Institute, and even later when becoming a teacher or another Institute, finally she found herself as member of a community of L2 users and discovered meaning, usefulness and appealing in the foreign language. The *transformation* here goes beyond the views or critics on how the participant had been taught English or the contrasts between teaching methodologies, to the view of the subject matter itself: what does English means for her? For her personal, academic, social and working life... and of course the awareness of how good her performance actually was in this now meaningful L2.

The **Teaching Experiences** that Susana started to have, are also observed in stages. From that initial moment when she felt that everything fell into place at last, when she entered the classroom, as a teacher now: she started to give instructions and deliver materials and it felt inexplicably good! It was an unexpected vocation call that affected her life path, however, after processing what she actually wanted to do for living (teaching English) a new awareness came along: the necessity to be trained for doing that, the need of getting a bachelor degree on EFL. Therefore, that initial stage of being a *non-professional language teacher*, hired due to her

knowledge of the language without pedagogical training, could not last that much, as the participant noticed that she needed to learn more about teaching.

Every new experience, working scenario, type of students the participant had in charge, evidenced the need to study and research about the best methodologies to apply, in order to succeed in the teaching activities. And this learning about teaching process never ends, as every day the average teacher faces different challenges, different types of students who learn in new ways, paces and exposed to different materials and technologies. A feature that characterizes the participant of this narrative inquiry, is the constant need to update her teaching practice according to the context.

Nowadays, as an university professional teacher of adults, the participant still finds the necessity to continue her training process, with her Master Degrees on distance modality, she evidences the language teacher need to move forward and advance for many reasons: not only the natural personal growth that leads them to positioning and prestige, but most importantly, the quality of their teaching practices which are expected to improve with every new degree. The equivalence between acquiring teaching degrees and improving the teaching exercise that results in students' learning, emerged in this narrative, which takes to the next reflection: the more the teacher learns, the more the student learns too.

It is impossible not to notice in the narrative, the relevance of the type of education the participant was exposed to when acquiring the bachelor degree on EFL: **Distance Education**, and how this not only describes her and her particular circumstances as a student, but also shaped her as a person in terms of: autonomy, academic growth, social and technological skills development. The implications of distance education are not only and purely academic, there are other factors that characterize the distance student, usually connected to personal, family and/or financial issues that lead them to be doing several major things at the same time, and only one of them entails studying a professional career.

In other words, the challenges of a distance student, which also a student of the face to face modality might have to face in some cases when working or keeping a family and studying at the same time; however these challenges are natural in distance students, they are expected to have their hands full and according to this in order to succeed to be a well-trained: time manager, autonomous learner, assertive user of the technologies that allow them to be in touch with the

learning environments, their tutors and fellow students; on top of all that, the subject matter or specific learning they need to acquire proficiently. With all of these apparent ‘difficulties’, it would be plausible to think that the success is almost impossible, or that a distance graduate would never embark in a similar project; however, as the participant expressed it: she does not see herself studying in a different way anymore, and both her Master Degrees are in this distance modality at international universities.

Based on the above, it is implied that once the methodology has been handled, it opens a range of growth possibilities that the language teacher is able to use in order to grow professionally and basically: to understand their learners better, in any modality that they are, as the participant expresses how being a distance student helped her in being an aware distance teacher. In conclusion, education is a privilege, especially in our country for a significant amount of the population, but the privilege does not rely only in the financial possibilities, but in the capability to adapt to ones’ circumstances and make the learning work, using appropriately the tools offered, this is one of the main reflections after conducting this narrative inquiry project.

As a researcher, obtaining a technological training in the use of N-Vivo program for qualitative research, was an unexpected positive aspect of this project. The developed skills in using these type of technological tools for discourse analysis, permitted me to manage a software which counts, classifies and categorizes words and meanings, and contributed significantly to the researcher’s job, in terms of specific and numeric quantification of relevant terms. It seemed like a fusion of research traditions, when a quantitative aspects of a narrative account of qualitative nature emerged, such as the number of words, which is susceptible to be described and related to the general themes that had been established prior to the data collection, and then was confirmed after that process. This type of tools, encourages the language learner and teaching researcher to continue growing in the investigative field, with new areas of interest and intervention, according to the possibilities that increase when new knowledge is not only acquired but build within research projects such as this one.

Finally, it is crucial to outstand that this project was possible, due to my participation in the Research Mentorship Program of Santo Tomás University, C.A.U. Bogotá- Colombia. As my personal training in Research processes was not only enhanced, but encouraged; exposing us to

different research traditions and methodologies which made us reflect as pre-service language teachers, on the best option to conduct our own research projects. In every stage of the research inquiry, the support of tutors was a key aspect, and also the participation in academic events, encounters, symposiums, seminars and congresses, made it possible to face the reality of our narrative inquiries, with other realities surrounding our language learning and teaching contexts.

After portraying the language teacher through her life experiences, based on the thematic analysis of a narrative, it is almost impossible not to mirror myself –the researcher- at different levels: also as a pre-service teacher in the distance modality, as a language teacher with teaching experiences in schools and institutes prior to the professional degree, as a researcher who is looking for to grow and advance in positioning and prestige, but most importantly in my personal learning, which is directly related to my own students' learning and growth. The awareness that the learning-teaching-learning processes do not finish here, but in a way they only start, as it must continue at higher levels of education, post-grades, master degrees, PHDs, with all the implication and social impact that it is going to generate, as the teacher growth is always reflected in hundreds, thousands and millions of learners at their influence.

A recommendation for the Subproject 'The voices of the LLEI realities: life stories and experiences' after conducting this narrative inquire, is to definitely continue reinforcing the Mentorship Program on EFL, and opening more spaces for its development. This is a privileged field for not only training students in research towards the teaching of the subject matter, but also to interact, communicate, and eventually enhance the possibilities to set up meaningful researches, to project discoveries, to create fresh and new findings generated by themselves once their voices have been empowered as pre-service teachers and language teachers in process of upgrading and positioning; with the clear goal to benefit and cause positive impacts in the population and context where the teaching practice is going to take place, and in many cases, where it is already taking place.

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