



Pre-Service Teacher's experience as Research Assistant at the LLEI: A Narrative Research
Report

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PRE-SERVICE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE AS RESEARCH ASSISTANT AT THE LLEI: A
NARRATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

RESEARCH FIELD

The use of the English Language and its Contexts

RESEARCH SUBPROJECT

The Voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and experiences

Research report presented as a requirement for the title in
Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

DIRECTED BY

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The process of learning how to do research is something necessary in the formation of future professionals in English Teaching and that is a fact of high importance at the Universidad Santo Tomás, specially at the Bachelor of Education in English Teaching program which, looking for new strategies to implement processes in which students could have a meaningful approach to research during their undergraduate formation, allowed me to become part of a research group leading by teachers, in the role of research assistant.

This paper aims to share the experiences and reflections I had during my time as assistant, this was done using Narrative enquiry, a method that allowed me to count my story in a thorough way while, at the same time, I could make meaning of my experience analysing it, this analysis was done through the use of Narrative Frames, which divided my story in three different moments, beginning with the experiences and conceptions I had previous to my role as assistant, the experience as assistant itself, and finally, the implications that it could have in my future as a professional.

KEY WORDS: Narrative, Formative Research, Narrative Frames.



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1. Contextualization

During my process as student in the Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Universidad Santo Tomás, I had the opportunity to be part of a research process guided by a group of teacher researchers from the program, playing the role of research assistant. This experience, pioneering in the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés (LLEI), led me to gain some insights and skills I did not have before, especially in the field of research; it brought also an opportunity to open new spaces at the LLEI in which students could have the occasion to put in practice and develop new research skills through formative research. It is from this context that the present research report arises as a narrative based on my personal experiences during my period as research assistant.

Due to the fact that the role of research assistant at the LLEI is something that has just been implemented recently at the program and therefore there is not any precedent, I considered important to narrate this experience so it could serve first as a source of reference to future research assistants, thus they could know beforehand the type of activities they could be involved in, as well as the kind of skills they could develop through this processes; and second, to the university to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of these processes in the research formation of the students, and contributing to the research field named “The Voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and Experiences”



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The research design selected to guide the story telling was narrative inquiry as its main strength “lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.” (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 2), something aligned with the objective of the project which consists in to narrate the experiences of a student performing the role of a research assistant at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés.

The chosen instrument to collect data were the Narrative frames, they gave me an outline to organise and write my experiences in a chronological and logical manner, at the same time I was able to reflect on my previous experiences, my perceptions on the process itself and the future implications that this experience could bring to my future as a professional English Teacher, leading me out to a process of reflective writing. As the outline sentences were previously established, narrative frames gave me also the opportunity to assure that all the relevant episodes of my experience would be included in the narrative even before I actually started to write it and that the research question: What were my experiences performing the role of research assistant at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés? would be fully answered.



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Vigencia por seis años



2. Research Statement

During my stance as a student at distance at Santo Tomás University I felt I had a problem with my approach to research, this situation led me to check alternatives, different to academic spaces, to develop and strengthen those research abilities I lacked. In this situation, I decided to make part of the program's Research Mentorship Program (Semillero de Investigación) that experience gave tools to progress in my academic process and was through that stage of my formation at the university that I was given the opportunity to have an approach to formative research as research assistant of a professors' group, this paper covers the narrative and reflections arose from that experience. This research report is intended to make visible the practises and reflections of its author, a student at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés (LLEI hereafter), on his experience as a research assistant at the bachelor's program.

It encompasses the analysis of his experience as one the first students in this academic program having the opportunity to become a research assistant, the way he was inspired to become part of the project, the experiences that he lived and his perspectives about how he feels that this process will affect his professional future. The type of narrative followed then is that of a narrative experience through narrative enquiry that according to Casey (1995) as cited by Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik (2014) "expands the range of voices that are heard in research reports, often highlighting the experiences of marginalised groups." (p.3).



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The relevance of this story resides in its distinctiveness, as the role of research assistant is something that is just being explored at the LLEI program, there is not a precedent, and therefore a clear definition on what does involve, what is their specific role and the kind of work they are supposed to carry out. The narration of this experience permits the author outlining in a clearer manner the objectives of this role, presenting his experiences and perspectives to future students that may be interested in taking part of this dynamics at the program, it also gives benefits to the Licenciatura and the university, giving them an evidence on how the execution of these new spaces in which formative research is implemented takes place and brings results. In addition, it offers an opportunity to reflect on and look for sources of future improvement at the university's formative research processes.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this narrative is not an isolated proposal, it makes part and contributes to the faculty of Education of the University and consequently to the LLEI as it is aligned with the research lines of the program through the subproject named *The Voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and Experiences*, in that sense this experience will help to make known the realities and experiences on how a student does and learns research in an at distance program context in Colombia.



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Vigencia por seis años



Research question

What were my experiences performing the role of research assistant at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés?

Research objective

To narrate my experiences performing the role of research assistant at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés.



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3. Theoretical Framework

In an educational setting, students live many experiences every day that could be meaningful or not, nevertheless it is important to note that the main focus of education should not lie just on giving experiences, but on how to make them meaningful in a practical and pedagogical way, so the student can actually make sense and learn from that, this process demands a thorough reflection by the student, and a capacity of self-reflection. These processes could be fostered through a process called Narrative Inquiry which allows participants to be both the author and the analyser of their own story, giving them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and give them meaning through the practice of research, this scenario gives birth to a research learning process known as formative research, method that is being implemented by the Universidad Santo Tomás, specifically the LLEI program through pedagogical strategies like the implementation of macroprojects and students' participation in groups as research assistants, , allowing students to gain experience and knowledge on research based on the practice.

Experience

An experience could be described as a meaningful event in which knowledge is taken from an empirical situation. When these situations are connected, they create stories that according to Creswell (2013) happen in specific locations or situations and have an explicit goal, the stories provide a meaningful insight as they give experiences a purpose. In this way the meaning of an



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experience is not independent of that of a story, as both depend on the context in which they were generated, the situation where they emerge and the person who is experiencing it.

An experience becomes an object of research when the person who lived it wants to make meaning out of it, and therefore show their reflections and insights on the events occurred in order to represent them to themselves and others (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014), this allows experiences go beyond being a historical event and therefore help to reconstruct the life of a person, check impressions and patterns and also reflect on their social and academic context in order to have a critical point of view and look for ways to improve their own lives for the present and the future.

Narrative Enquiry

One of the ways in which a researcher can organise their experiences and identities in order to understand them in a critical and reflective manner is through Narrative Inquiry, that according to Barkhuizen et al. (2014) could be described as “an established umbrella term for research involving stories” (p. 3); this kind of approach to research “brings storytelling and research together either by using stories as research data or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 3).

One of the advantages found in this approach consists in that it “expands the range of voices that are heard in research reports, often highlighting the experiences of marginalized groups” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 3). this enables participants to express not just their living situations



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but also their impressions and feelings, giving it a more human approach and a wider opportunity to display a big diversity of experiences. In terms of Barkhuizen et al. (2014) Narrative Inquiry “is a profoundly human way of carrying out research; it gets you out of the house or office and into the real world of teachers, learners, and the stories they have to tell.” (p. 3)

The main features of this kind of narratives according to Medgyes (1994) as cited by Barkhuizen et al. (2014) are that they could adopt a spoken o written form, are produced by people who have something to say and think this information could be important for themselves or others, are located in an specific setting and time, have a progress over the time, point to a specific period that the narrator wants to develop and also should have an aim and significance in the contexts they occur, as finally are from these ones that they have emerged and are the ones that could be benefited lastly.

“The main strength of narrative inquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.” (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 2) giving participants and researchers the possibility to get meaningful insights from their immediate contexts and experiences that could later be applied to improve themselves.



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Formative Research

When we speak about Formative Research we are referring to research training (Hernandez, 2003). According to the Consejo Nacional de Acreditación, (as cited by Restrepo, 2003) Formative Research is conceived as a type of research done between students and teachers in the process of development of an academic program's curriculum. This approach to research, allows students to experiment in a conscious and meaningful way the procedures involved in a research process first hand (Hernandez, 2003).

In accordance to Restrepo (2003) the intention of Formative Research is to familiarise students with formal research, its nature, phases and functioning; using different pedagogical strategies inside and outside classroom like the study of case studies, participate in institutional research programs as assistants, data collections, etc.

On the other hand, is important to highlight that in Formative Research processes, students should play a strong active role, as it is no longer focused on the reception of knowledge but on its production, taking as a standing point Problem Based Learning (PBS) in which you learn by doing, and change classroom dynamics from a teacher centred to a student centred one.



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To conclude, it is also important to note that the formative part of Formative Research does not exempt it from having methodological rigour. Thoroughness should be fundamental not just in Formal Research, but in its learning too. (Restrepo, 2003)

Macroproject

This term is relatively newly being used in the context of education and research. According to Bonilla, M., Hernandez, E., & Medina, M. (2017) “A Macroproject is an umbrella research topic, or area of knowledge, that is directly linked to the objectives and fields of research of an academic program, and the realities of its members (directors, professors, and students).” (p. 7262).

The goal of a macroproject consists in to group different projects around a common point, as Bonilla, M., et al., (2017) say:

“Macroproject aims at directing all the research done in a program towards a common point (in our case, to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language), to strengthen the academic production and consolidate the research tradition of a given curriculum. Also, a Macroproject focuses on making research processes and results (products) meaningful and transcendent.” (p. 7262).



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Through the conjunction of this common points, students have the opportunity to establish relationships with other people interested in similar research topics, share ideas and sources, and count with a guideline to carry out their own research projects, fostering cooperative learning and giving teachers tools to implement Formative Research processes adjusted to the policies and lines of research given by universities and schools.



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4. Research Design

Descriptive Research

As stated by Ellis (2012) the term Descriptive Research serves as an umbrella term to different approaches which consist in the comprehensive account of specific contexts, taking as standpoint the perspective of the subject; as a result, these approaches do not seek for generalisations, but to understand a precise phenomenon, along with its social and cultural context.

Descriptive Research also presents a unique approach to data collection, in that sense it “relies on observation of the phenomena under study and, in some types, on self-reports obtained from the participants involved” (Ellis, 2012, p. 42), regarding its analysis, Ellis (2012) states that as “it assumes that knowledge and understanding of phenomena is subjective” (p. 42), it “seeks to counter the subjectivity of the researcher by demonstrating that the research findings are consistent with the data (i.e. are trustworthy) and reflect the views point of different participants” (Ellis, 2012, p. 42).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Enquiry is defined as “an established umbrella term for research involving stories” (Barkhuizen et al, 2014, p. 3); it joins together storytelling and research by making



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use of stories, either written or oral, as instruments to analyse data and present results.

(Barkhuizen et al, 2014).

This design allows people to “use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.” (Barkhuizen et al, 2014, p. 2) in this sense, it helps to fulfil the objective of this report as it enables me to organise, reflect on, and share insights based on own those personal experiences I had while I played the role of research assistant at the University.

Nevertheless, these narratives are not created at random they meet the following conditions:

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

(Barkhuizen et al, 2014. p. 7)

The story presented in this study fulfils all the above characteristics as it is presented in a written manner making use of Narrative Frames, was produced by me as a student who had



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the opportunity to live an experience a formative research experience at the LLEI through the role of research assistant, the narrative follows a time sequence and presents my context starting from the knowledge and experiences I had previous to start my functions as assistant, continuing with the experience itself, the insights and lacks I presented and how I overcame them, it finishes with the implications that this process could have in my development as a professional.

The approach to narrative inquiry is done through the analysis of narratives, as the personal story written, uses its methodology of data collection to classify and analyse these experiences as a tool to make meaning of my own experience as participant, taking into account that the events are framed in the context of a formative research process at the university and the experiences and conclusions presented by this, could serve as a material of reflection for the LLEI program and future research assistants.

Instruments

According to Barkhuizen et al (2014), written data in narrative inquiry could emerge from different contexts, one of these is the one in which learners are researchers themselves, writing and organising their experiences, to later analyse them as data and share their results, a context shared by the me as a research assistant at the university. With the aim of gathering and presenting data in a story telling manner and keeping in



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mind the features of a narrative inquiry I elaborated Narrative Frames, which could be defined as “a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. It is structured as a story in skeletal form.” (Barkhuizen et al, 2014. p. 45). This instrument gave me the opportunity to write my experience in a chronological and structured manner.

As the aim was to portray the most relevant aspects of my experience as research assistant, my first task consisted in the creation and organization of the Narrative Frames themselves, due to the fact that it was intended to display my process from the causes that took me to be part of the research group, going through the process itself as an assistant and the implications that I thought it would have for my professional future, I created three different Narrative Frames, the first one beginning with my history and perceptions about research previous to my role as assistant, my perspective on the research field subjects at the university, the difficulties I had before I actually started my process and my participation in the Research Mentorship Program. The second Narrative Frame recounts my entrance to the research group, the activities I was responsible for, my impressions on the realization of those tasks, the barriers I faced during the process and how I overcame them with the help of the professors and my fellow student and finally, how I presented the results of my process and the outcomes of it. In the third frame I put my impressions on the process after having ended it, the possible implications that it





would have for my professional future and how it would help me to become a better teacher. This threefold division established the creation of the outline sentences, allowing me to ensure I would cover all relevant aspects of my story without skipping any of significant importance.

It also enabled me to put my critical reflections on the facts I lived while I counted them, leaving a space for critical thinking in which I could portray my thoughts and compare my personal and professional development before, during and after the process to check how it impacted my own formative process at the university, the new abilities it helped me to cultivate and how this new skills could affect me in my future as a professional in English Language Teaching as a Foreign Language.



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5. Data Analysis

As it was described previously, for the data analysis it is followed the methodology of narrative frames, proposed by Barkhuizen et al. (2008), these are defined as:

A written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths.” It is structured as a story in skeletal form. The aim is for respondents to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and their reflections on these. (Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p.45).

To tell the story in a thorough way, my previous conceptions and the implications that this process brought to my own life, I have divided this story in three different sections organised as follows:

- *Previous learning:* Consisting in my research experiences at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés, before I got involved into the research group, such as my experience with the research academic spaces and my participation in the Research Mentorship Program.
- *Experience as assistant:* Involves the actual practise as research assistant, the experiences, activities and challenges it presented, and the strategies used to overcome my difficulties and lacks.
- *Implications:* Encompasses a reflection on the future implications that this experience could bring to my professional development.



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Vigencia por seis años



My story as a research assistant, part I

PREVIOUS LEARNING:

When I first started to experience the learning of research in my classes, my relation with such process was difficult and frustrating, at that time I was interested in the topic but I did not have any idea on how could I start to do research, I supposed that I would learnt about it in one of my three preliminary classes of the research field, named: Fundamentos de la Investigación, Procesos de la Investigación and Enfoques Investigativos: Investigación Cuantitativa y Cualitativa, which I received during my first three semesters at the university, unfortunately, I felt this first experience was not a meaningful one for my own process, as all I learnt were theories but not too much about their implementation, the contents were to general (Tutoring sessions were received along with students from other academic programs) and furthermore the accompaniment made by the teachers was so scarce as we received a tutoring session once a month, some issues I had with my research learning process during that time were that I did not feel a real accompaniment as the academic space was designed to be taught to students from different academic programs at the Faculty of Education and there were so many students, so the teachers could not give a more personal accompaniment but gave general advice and instructions for everyone, additionally the teachers were not an English



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teachers but experts in other fields, so I felt that sometimes they did not understand my ideas and could not give me further advice on the topics as they did not know anything about it. As a consequence, I started feeling that the given knowledge was not relevant to my own life because I could not find a meaningful connection between those concepts, my future life as an English teacher and the field of English Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL). These events affected my motivation and interest to the point I started feeling aversion to the topic.

To conclude each one of these subjects, I was expected to do a research proposal at the end of the academic term, I remember struggling myself trying to present a good job, but as my skills were so weak and I did not have any tools to have a good performance, my marks were not always good as I expected. As a way to overcome those problems I decided to be part of the research mentorship program at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés (LLEI), this space gave me the opportunity to learn about how to do research in the EFL field. This program consisted in a series of weekly meetings with a tutor designated by the bachelor's program and a group of students interested in doing research and share their experiences with each other, as in this case I was surrounded by people of my own program and interested into investigate about topics motivating for me I started to attend these meetings with some regularity, with the help of the tutor who helped me first to organise my interests and stablish some researchable ideas based on that information, I could start to do my first steps in research, creating research questions





and reading more about the topic, later I could start to share my ideas with fellow students from different semesters and besides listen their own reports, this process gave me additional feedback as I could reunite ideas not just from my tutor, but also from my fellow students, ideas that were later incorporated to improve my own process. I feel that the mentorship program was a platform that catapulted me to start liking research, nevertheless, and though I felt I could learn a lot, I never concreted a solid research proposal, was during that time when the tutor told me about a new opportunity to do research at the university and gave me the possibility to become a research assistant, when I was offered to be part of a research team at the university as assistant, my motivation was that it would be a good opportunity to learn about the topic as I would be asked to do some activities but I could have a closer contact with the professors and in this way I could acquire research experience in a pragmatic and meaningful way, at the same time I would be able to get academic experience being part of a research group at a university. During my first meeting with the team of professors I was assigned the functions of conducting the needs analysis of the project, indagate about the state of the art, construction of the reference framework, among others; I remember myself feeling a little bit nervous that day, as all those responsibilities and commitments I was receiving were at that moment challenging for me to complete, nonetheless all my questions were cleared by the professors, they gave me information to read if I had any questions and





were always willing to share additional sources were I could get even more data, the experience of being a research assistant had started.



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My story as a research assistant, part II

EXPERIENCE AS ASSISTANT:

My activities as a research assistant were together with a fellow assistant, the conduction of a needs analysis through contacting different universities in which where imparted academic programs related to ours, during this process I could check in the Ministry of National Education's database (MEN) a list of certified programs that fulfilled the requisite of being a program of Language teaching as a Foreign Language and imparted in Bogotá, either in a presence based, virtual or at distance modality. I was asked to create a matrix in which I could organise data like the name of the university and the academic program offered, the emphasis of the program, their syllabus, the person in charge of the research process in each one of the programs and a telephone number or email. This data was the basis under which I could start my job, the programs were divided at random, half for me and half for my fellow to contact and ask for an interview with the person in charge of the research field in their respective academic programs; twelve out of the sixteen academic programs we found relevant to carry out our data collection through interviews in Bogotá agreed to collaborate with us. When I did my first interview I was so nervous as it was a completely new experience for me, previously I had read some documents that the professors had sent me to read, but the fact of facing



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directly the experience was something completely different, something I could note was my improvement with each interview I did, when my teachers and I checked the audios, they gave me additional feedback that I tried to apply for the next meeting, in that way I enhanced my skills as an interviewer and my self-confidence. Finished that step my fellow and I started to analyse the data, we did this in two steps, first we created a matrix in which we compared their commonalities and differences with each other and with our own program regarding categories like degree options, the way in which research was carried out in the program, what they considered their strengths and weaknesses in the research process of their students, the expected research outcome of their students at the end of the program and if they were part of any research network. Having gathered and compared this information, we were asked by the professors to present a report of this stage's results written in an argumentative essay, this process was also a tough one as my fellow and I did not have enough skills to write an essay like that, so the professors gave us information on the way to do it and some instructions to guide our writing process, during this step I realised I had a gap in my writing process, but this was overcome thanks to the guide of my teachers and fellow student and time spent reading and looking for information about the topic on internet, this fostered my commitment to the process I was going through. To finish what could be called as the first part of my experience as assistant my fellow student and I socialised our experience in the academic event named “Tercer Encuentro de Experiencias Investigativas USTA Colombia”, in which apart





from have our first experience doing an oral dissertation to an academic community, we had the opportunity to show our work to people from different parts of the country and receive their feedback.

The second part of the experience consisted in the application of interviews to students belonging to the LLEI in order to collect their impressions on the application of macroprojects at the university, for this phase my fellow assistant and I had to interview a total of fourteen students, all of them belonging to different places in which the university has seats. Once the data was collected, we started its analysis, which in this case was slightly different, as we were asked to transcript all the interviews, something I found difficult as it took plenty of time, then we classified the information into four categories, named awareness, connecting, impressions and distance education all of them gave us a main frame on the knowledge, appropriation and usefulness of the implementation of macroprojects at the university as well as their opinions on the topic. Finally, my fellow assistant and I presented our complete experience at the Encuentro Regional de Semilleros de Investigación, leaded by the Colombian web of research mentorship programs (RedCOLSI), in this case we had the opportunity to present our work to people from many other universities located in Bogotá. When I first started to develop these activities, I found them very difficult for me as I had to do things I never had done before like the application of an interview, a tabulation of data or the analysis of data, everything was new to me and from the beginning I knew I would need to work hard, but at the same



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time I fill that the process itself was so well carried out that I never felt I could not do something, even though the process in many occasions was not the easiest, I knew I had the support of the professors and my peer to clarify doubts and finish all the activities, I always felt the guidance and support of my teachers and this made the process easier and more meaningful for me, even so to fulfil better my functions as an assistant, I realised that I needed to acquire some abilities I did not have before, some of them included investigate about how to carry out the application of an interview, how to write an argumentative essay, learn how to create graphics in Excel or how to do a project's presentation in a research encounter, these abilities were acquired through the reading of documents and feedback provided by the leader professors of the group, I spent a lot of time reading books and articles, as well as watching videos to be as much informed and prepared to fulfil my functions as possible, in this way another skill I could develop through this process was autonomy as a learner, as I should find additional sources of information by my own in order to fulfil my duties as a research assistant, read documents and books in order to have additional guidance and learn how to use different computer programs to create graphics and edit documents online, connected with my fellow.

I found this process difficult because of my context as a student at distance specially because I was working at that moment and I had to divide my time between my job, the university and my duties as assistant which included calling people, arrange meetings,





moving from my homeplace (Cajicá, Cundinamarca) to Bogotá, attend meetings with the leader professors, etc nevertheless, I could overcome this obstacles thanks to teamwork and technology, this last one played a fundamental role to kept me communicated with my fellow assistant and my professors, I used tools like the email, shared documents with my peer through Google Docs or had meetings with her using Skype or WhatsApp, another source of help was the constant accompaniment of my teachers, who were always willing to give us their perspectives and help anytime we needed it.

Finally, I can say that this process was rewarding and valuable for me, as it gave me a real experience of what it means to do research and in which all the time I could connect theoretical knowledge with the reality, that way it was a meaningful experience that really changed my perspective on what it means to do research and I think it is one of the best ways to start your path as a researcher, sadly this kind of experience doing research was not available to a lot of students at the university until that moment, so I felt fortunate to have the opportunity to improve my skills as a researcher, learn more about it while I was able to do it, and open the doors to other students to have a similar experience in the future at the university.



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My story as a research assistant, part III

IMPLICATIONS:

Now my relationship with research is better, now I understand its relevance in my own professional development and feel myself more confident to carry out a research process by myself, the gradual and guided experience I had as a research assistant was definitely one that changed my understanding of this subject itself as I felt it closer to reality and could catch its relevance to understand and propose solutions to certain contexts, in this way research is no longer a boring or tiresome topic for me but an experience that gives me tools to change realities. Some tools I considered the process of being an assistant gave me were the knowledge and practice on the process of carry out a method of qualitative data collection and analysis, self-reliance to present and defend a research project in front of a public, and an academic and professional background thanks to the events in which I had the opportunity to participate, improve and diversify my use of technology and technological devices and in a more personal level, it gave me the opportunity to develop qualities such as self-confidence, autonomy regarding my learning process, team work and maturity to accept others' corrections and advice, thanks to all of these skills now I am capable of performing an interview to gather data, do a data analysis, write argumentative essays, do transcriptions, classify and extract information





relevant to previously defined categories or look for emerging categories; in a nutshell I can say that now I am capable of developing a complete research process.

As a conclusion, I think this experience will impact on my professional future, as now I have got abilities to do research myself at any context in which I am working. I developed skills needed not just as a researcher but as a teacher, like the use of technological sources to support my activities or the experience of doing presentations in academic events, something that could be considered a bonus for future job applications in my field, moreover I could implement this kind of strategies with future students in order for them to learn research in a smoother and more meaningful way.



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6. Conclusions and Implications

My experience as assistant at the University led me to change my whole perspective on research, going from a comprehension purely based on books, in which concepts were something distant, abstract and difficult to understand, to a meaningful experience in which research became part of my immediate reality and theory made sense in a real context. In this sense, it gave me the opportunity, as student, to gain meaningful experience, overcome difficulties in a field I was having problems to understand, and develop new skills that would help me in my life as student at the university and my future as professional.

The narration and reflection on my research experience gave me the opportunity to find new insights and become aware of my own progress through the process, this self-reflective practice could be done thanks to the creation and writing of the Narrative Frames, where I was able to have a more evaluative perspective and check how this experience made sense in terms of how it helped me to develop new skills, what kind of strategies were used, how effective were those strategies with me, how it helped me improve my academic process at the university and how it fostered my professional growing.

Regarding my role as assistant, it gave me a deeper insight into the processes that are carried out inside the academic program by the professors, how the university is always



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looking for strategies to make learning more meaningful for students and, how I as student can play an active role in the implementation of these new strategies. This role also helped me develop research skills like the ability to carry out interviews, thematic data analysis, the writing of research essays, interview's transcriptions, presentations in research conferences, among others, through the assignation of tasks and the recommendation of additional sources, like books and research papers, that helped me to accomplish all my functions successfully.

To be a research assistant gave me also a good opportunity to internalise the implementation of macroprojects at the university, as I was part not just in their implementation from an internal way as student, but also in an external way as assistant of the project that was being implemented in my own formation. This double perspective provided an occasion for me to realise how the processes of research were generating a real impact in the professional formation of many fellow students and at the same time how it was having an impact in my own research development.

This narrative experience could be relevant for both the university and the program as it portrays how those new strategies, implemented to improve research processes, are being lived by students, how effective are the being and to evaluate what kind of strategies are functioning and which ones should be modified so they could improve. Moreover, it offers



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students who could be facing obstacles with research like me or are just interested in to know how the role of research assistant is experienced at the university, to understand what kind of experiences could they face, the kind of skills they could develop during this process and what would be expected from them by the university if they decide to take on this role.

Although taking on this role could seem simple, it is not indeed. As I was completing my tasks I realised what kind of lacks I had, so I decided to study more on those topics, like for example how to conduct an interview, how to ask questions to not get biased answers, how to write a critical essay to present results, etc. This process made me overcome those weaknesses through a self-evaluative process, fostering learning autonomy and self-reflection. Another hardship I faced was the lack of personal contact with my fellow assistant to share some ideas, as we were working and lived so far one from another, this was overcome by the use of technological tools like the computer and our mobile phones, in this way we were always connected and had which tasks were we performing at the moment, solved some questions and work together along the whole process.

Some recommendations I would give to future students interested into taking the role of assistant at the university include, to manage well your time, as it is a big responsibility you are going to take along with other duties like working or the studies at the university, and if you do not manage your time in an organise way, it could become a hard experience. Another



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recommendation is to become passionate about the topic you are doing research about as you will have to read a lot, look for additional resources by yourself, to respond for many tasks and finally, to replicate all the knowledge and experiences you would have acquired with many other people in congresses and seminars, so you should expect a lot of hard work. Finally, it is so important to establish a good communication with both your teachers and fellow assistant, as just through this strategy you would be able to finish all your tasks, clarify questions and have meaningful accompaniment in the process.

To conclude, it is important to note that this experience will have an effect in my future as a professional English teacher, as now have a certified research experience that can be verified through my participation in research encounters and this could be added to my curriculum, moreover, I have seen and experienced how research processes truly lead to change the realities of both students and teachers and are an efficient tool to transform educational and pedagogical contexts. As Barkhuizen et al (2014) says, narrative inquiry is “relevant to research in our field (Education) because it helps us to understand the inner mental worlds of language teachers and learners and the nature of language teaching and learning as social and educational activity.” And as is just through a close knowledge of a phenomena that we can start to make amendments, it taught me how to be a teacher implies to constantly be aware of my everchanging context and look for a constant improvement, in other words, the teacher’s practice is never separated from the research practice.



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8. Annexes

1. Reflective Journals

1.1. Narrative Frame on Previous Learning.

My story as a research assistant, part I

PREVIOUS LEARNING:

When I first started to experience the learning of research in my classes, my relation with such process was _____

some issues I had with my research learning process during that time were _____

_____ as a way to overcome that problem I decided to be part of the research mentorship program at the Licenciatura en Lengua Extranjera Inglés, this space gave me the opportunity to _____

when I was offered to be part of a research team at the university as assistant, my motivation was _____

_____, during my first meeting with the team of professors I _____

Note. Adapted from "Revisiting narrative frames: An Instrument for Investigating language teaching and learning," by G. Barkhuizen, 2014, System, 47, p. 24-27. Copyright 2014 by Elsevier Ltd.



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1.2. Narrative Frame on the Experience as Assistant.

My story as a research assistant, part II

THE EXPERIENCE AS ASSISTANT:

My activities as a research assistant were _____

_____, *when I first started to develop such activities I*

found them _____

_____ *to fulfil better my functions as an assistant I realised that I needed to acquire some abilities I did not have before, some of them included _____*

these abilities were acquired through _____

I found this process difficult because of my context as a student at distance specially because _____

_____ *nevertheless, I could overcome this obstacles*

thanks to _____

_____ *Finally, I can say that this process was _____*

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1.3. Narrative Frame on Implications.

My story as a research assistant, part III

IMPLICATIONS:

Now my relationship with research is _____

_____, some tools I considered the process of being an assistant

gave me where _____

_____,

now I am capable of _____

_____. As a conclusion, I think this

experience will impact on my professional future, as _____

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