

Professional Teacher Identity: Methodological Alternatives for Qualitative Research

Identidad Profesional Docente: Alternativas Metodológicas para la Investigación Cualitativa

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Abstract:

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teacher's identity is a process where language, as an object of study, is a tool in the mediation for scaffolding the identity of future teachers. Identity construction is not an isolated process. Instead, it is the result of a continuous and social process that embraces a variety of factors and the tension of diverse forces, struggles, and adjustments that the individual deals with. In the last two decades, an increasing number of qualitative studies focused on EFL teachers' professional identity have been conducted. To identify how professional identity is constructed, it must be understood as a product of discourse, practice, and relationships. Moreover, identity is developed through the stories (narratives) describing life encounters that have shaped who they are as teachers. Both discourse and narratives help teachers define and redefine themselves as professionals through the meaning they give to their lived experiences. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to address discourse and narratives as two research perspectives to investigate EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity. First, the link between qualitative and identity studies is presented. Then, discourse analysis and narratives as methodological alternatives are introduced. Finally, implications and reflections for teacher education are discussed.

Keywords:

identity construction, professional identity, foreign language pre-service teachers, discourse analysis, narratives

Resumen:

La identidad de los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera en formación es un proceso donde el lenguaje, como objeto de estudio, se convierte en una herramienta de mediación en el andamiaje de la formación de su identidad. La construcción de la identidad no es un proceso aislado; por el contrario, es el resultado de un proceso social continuo que involucra diversos factores y fuerzas que entran en tensión, luchas y adaptaciones. En los últimos veinte años se han incrementado el número de estudios cualitativos enfocados en la identidad profesional del docente de inglés como lengua extranjera. Comprender la construcción de la identidad profesional implica entenderla como el producto de discursos, prácticas y relaciones. Aún más, ésta se desarrolla a través de historias o narrativas que describen momentos vitales que han moldeado a los docentes. Tanto el discurso como las narrativas permiten a los docentes definir y redefinirse como profesionales a través del significado que le adjudican a sus experiencias de vida. El propósito de este trabajo es proponer el estudio del discurso y las narrativas como dos perspectivas para investigar la identidad profesional de los futuros docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera. En primera instancia, se presenta la relación entre los estudios de identidad y el enfoque cualitativo. En segundo lugar, el análisis del discurso y las narrativas como alternativas metodológicas para la investigación. Finalmente, se concluye con la discusión de las implicaciones y reflexiones de este tipo de trabajo para el área de la formación docente.

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Palabras Clave:

Construcción de la identidad, identidad profesional, docentes de lenguas extranjeras en formación, análisis del discurso, narrativas

INTRODUCTION

In educational studies, the process of identity construction is a complex issue to be discussed since it entails considering a mosaic of factors that interrelate between social contexts that are interiorized in linguistic or discursive practices. Understanding this phenomenon means discussing how individuals interact with their social contexts in order to develop the identity (ies) that best suits their purposes at a particular place and time. In the case of professional identity; for example, it is the intersection between personal and institutional frameworks which define and redefine an individual's profile identity over time (Pillen et al., 2013). In the field of education and, particularly, in the area of foreign language teaching, teachers' identity construction has become an important issue due to the different ways it can influence teachers' professional performance and development from early pre-service times until the day they become part of the labor market.

The ways professional identity is developed or constructed reveal a complex and multifaceted process. On one hand, it is important to look into this process from different points of view in order to have a wider scope of concepts and (sociocultural) theories which could help understand how they work and could be better addressed. On the other hand, it becomes relevant and imperative to look for the different methodological approaches to research in which these identities have been and can be researched in order to learn what approach can become more useful when studying professional identity. Needless to say, the issue of professional identity construction of foreign language teachers research takes relevance as we move towards an understanding and interpretation of teachers' discourse and narratives, in which language becomes the means to identity construction. As the methodological approaches to study professional identity multiply so do the ways of how identities' construction unfolds.

Because professional teacher identity is a core element of teacher formation and development, it should be addressed from different research perspectives. Then, the purpose of this paper is to elucidate qualitative research as a useful methodological alternative to understand teachers' professional identity construction and development. More particularly, this paper aims to demonstrate how professional identities can be studied from the qualitative perspectives of discourse and narratives by presenting a literature review and a description of two investigations applied at a public university in Mexico. To achieve these aims two research questions have guided this literature review paper.

1. How are the qualitative approaches of discourse and narratives used in teachers' professional identity studies?
2. How is professional identity constructed from the discourse and narrative perspectives?

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Identity construction has widely been discussed as a process. In more contemporary cultural studies, this process has been associated with different factors such as language. Out of this discussion, researchers have coined the term subject-of-language-approach (Du Gay et al., 2002). This approach focuses on the idea that identities (professional, for example) "are constituted through the reiterative power of discourse to produce that which it also names and regulates" (p. 2). According to this approach, individuals, in this case, future teachers, would construct their identities depending on the discourses they produce as they talk about themselves as well as on what others talk about them.

This subject-of-language approach sustains that those discursive practices are involved in the development and construction of identities and work as part of a process of identification (identify-identification). This process of identification is never seen as completed; thus, it is always in progress (Hall, 2002). In this sense, identity is constantly negotiated by incorporating changes as they evolve personally and professionally. In the case of studies of future teachers, one can always expect for them to incorporate into their identities what they are exposed to in different (discourse) communities.

The concept of identity under the subject-of-language-approach takes the construction of such identities as something dynamic. They are seen as emerging from different contexts where individuals need to be understood as "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (Hall, 2002, p. 17). Thus, a community of practice would serve as such institutional site that would influence the process of identity construction of future teachers. Another aspect related to the influence of language and identity is the case of narratives and how these reflect individuals' positionality depending on the meaning they want to give to the events included or not, in their life history.

In brief, the subject-of-language-approach promises to be a suitable framework to study the construction of professional identities by analyzing the discourse of foreign language teachers in the context of communities of practice as well as

their narratives as they go through their teacher education program.

The Discourse Perspective

Discourse analysis was developed as a counterpart to the Chomskyan and structuralist theories prevailing in the 1950s, which focused on the internal processes of learning, acting, and performing (Patry & Nespoulous, 1990; Wooffitt, 2005). The precursors of discourse analysis purported that language is to be explored from a social perspective emphasizing the pragmatic aspects of language that regard meaning, contextual cues to interpreting and using language, and subject-to-subject variation. The main contributions arose from an evolution of structuralism and pragmatics, as can be seen in the following table:

Authors	Contributions
V. Propp (structuralism)	Narrative structure analysis, models based on episodes (story grammars)
E. Benveniste (structuralism)	Discourse type study and cohesion
Prague School (functionalism)	Pragmatics and thematic progression
M.A.K. Halliday (functionalism)	Study of syntax in the perspective of systemic grammar, cohesion (later)
CH. Bally (stylistics)	A systematic account of stylistic features in (ordinary) discourse and the study of modalization
J.L. Austin	Pragmatics-speech acts

Table 1. Historical background Source: Patry & Nespoulous, (1990)

In the 70's, Kummer, Kiefer, and Van Dijk presented their studies on text, grammar and discourse, which were the first attempts to analyze language beyond the sentence level and to explain that language is a matter of meaning and interaction. Later, Bolinger, Halliday, Ladd, and Chafe continued research on discourse with a focus on linguistics aspects such as intonation, transitional devices, and context and interpretation (Schiffrin et al., 2001).

Despite the importance of linguistic analysis, there was another wave of discourse analysis contributions that were using the principles of constructivism and sociocultural theories as their main foundational pillars. Gee (2004, 2006, 2008, 2011) proposes that individuals learn different social languages instead of a single, isolated language. These social languages will provide the speakers with the tools to interact and develop in a community they share common grounds with. Discourse is used to assert the speakers' position as they enact a socially determined identity and engage in socially situated activities (Gee, 2004).

Meaning, as much as identity, is never a fixed, static construct but rather a continuously evolving one. This evolution results from social interaction and steady negotiation (Hawkins, 2004). Meaning then, is socially situated in relation to the cultural paradigms the individual has to respond to, as well as the individual, internal processing of the models and roles these paradigms dictate (Gee, 2004; Gee, 2006).

Discourse with a capital 'D'

Discourse analysis is to be characterized by Gee (2008) as discourse with a small 'd' and refers mainly to what is done in linguistics regarding the study of the pragmatic aspects of language. As a progression of his studies and complemented with sociocultural theories, Gee (2006) introduced the construct of Discourse with a big 'D', which pertains the way individuals integrate language, actions, technologies, tools, objects, beliefs, and values that are socially determined with those of others in a socially and historically situated interaction. This process shapes identity and regulates the way people become members of a community (Wooffitt, 2005). Per Gee (2006), "we are creatures of language" (p. xii). Language is more than a tool to provide information to others or to say something; language allows individuals to be, do, and say.

Gee suggests discourse analysis as a tool to explore language-in-use in an attempt to provide insight into how cultural, social, and linguistic components are used to interact. Most importantly, Gee (2006) recognizes the value of other models for discourse analysis proposed before and along his own theories, such as those by Schiffrin (1994), Van Dijk (1997), Jaworki and Coupland (1999), Wodak and Meyer (2002), Fairclough (2003), Schiffrin et al. (2003), and Rogers (2004), scholars who have taken different perspectives to study the same issue.

Language is used socially to *do* things. It is used to establish the significance of interactions and talk; to set, discuss, and carry out activities; to construct, shape, and adapt identity; to build and regulate relationships; to enact politics (to assert the roles every individual has to play and the labels they need to respond to); to institute connections with others; and to develop and put into practice a sign system and knowledge (Gee, 2004; Gee, 2006; Clarke, 2008). In order to explore how the previously mentioned actions are attained, Gee (2004, 2006, 2008, 2011) proposes a set of tools of inquiry, which are always in constant evolution since they are intrinsically related to the transformation of communities and social interaction.

Discourses are ways of enacting and recognizing different sorts of socially situated and significant identities through the use of language integrated with characteristic ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects (including our bodies), tools, and technologies in concert with other people (Gee, 2011). For Gee (2011), the way to distinguish

Discourse from 'discourse' is by understanding that Discourse with a capital 'D' refers to all the elements beyond the use of language -as in discourse- but to the cultural behavior, values, and beliefs that contribute to individuals' identity construction and membership to a group.

The tools proposed by Gee (2011) include social languages, intertextuality, situated meaning, and figured worlds. The first one arises from sociolinguistic theory and states that every language is made up of several socially situated languages, or *sociolects* that are the different codes used to enact different social identities. Secondly, intertextuality focuses on the relationship between what is said and other texts, namely the allusions to shared knowledge and experiences. The third tool is situated meaning, stemming from cognitive psychology which purports that beyond a denotative meaning that can be understood by many, there are connotative meanings of language that are socially mediated. Fourth, the figured worlds tool, which accounts for the interpretation of experiences and events that depend on the sociocultural perspective of the individuals and the community they belong to. And finally, Discourse with a big 'D', which points out that the expression and interpretation of language in speaking, listening, reading, and writing is directly related to ways of feeling, acting, valuing, thinking, and being that are socially determined by the communities they belong to.

Discourse analysis and communities of practice

Identity is constructed by using language (Gee, 2006; Hawkins, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Norton and Toohey (2011) explain that the place of individuals and the way they interpret themselves and others can be established through the analysis of discourse. Besides their individual enterprises as members of a sociocultural group, teachers will transform their identity through a process of occupational/professional socialization (Martell, 2015). Social interaction and action are the processes through which identity and cognition are constructed. It is in this context that language functions as the means and the end of human endeavor (Hawkins, 2008). Identity and all the issues it implies are asserted and symbolized through language, the main element of discourse, which also comprises components such as culture, social norms, literacy, and the like (Turuk, 2008).

As Gee (2008) explains, discourse, understood as those interconnected linguistic productions that act as the 'glue' that keeps a community together as a result of creating sense, 'meaning', in a constructive, collaborative way, represent the use of language to assert the individual's identity as a member of a community. This language use conceptualized as Discourse with a capital D, regards the expression of values, roles, beliefs, speaking styles an individual makes us of to signal membership to a community (Gee, 2011).

Discourse allows individuals to become members of a community of practice, defined by Wenger as "a learning partnership among people who find it useful to learn from and with each other about a particular domain" (Wenger, et al. 2011, p. 5). Teachers place themselves as affiliates of a group that partakes values and expectations; and which members construct a shared identity. Belonging to this community allows them to learn from each other and to face the challenges of the teaching practice in individual and collective ways. Identity is co-constructed within the community and is also negotiated with members from other communities.

As pointed by Gee (2000), through discourse, individuals state who they are and enact identity by comparing themselves to others through language. For instance, when an individual is constructing their professional identity as a teacher, they will compare themselves to the models of 'good' or 'bad' teachers they know by speaking about the features or roles of such professionals.

The following is a recount of three studies that examine how professional teacher identity is constructed through discourse. First, Wu and Guo (2019) discuss how professional teacher identity is constructed through classroom interactions, especially the ones carried out conversationally. In their analysis of two English high school classes, they establish how the discursive strategies of teachers will allow them to build different types of professional identities. Some teachers will develop a democratic identity that would provide more chances for student progress while others might develop an authoritarian identity that will set the classroom environment in a different interactional mode. Conversational strategies are used in different ways to mobilize students' opportunities to initiate learning. Meanings about the way teachers become and how they interact with students are discussed from the perspective that identity is shaped and displayed by communicating with others (Hadden & Lester, 1978 as cited in Wu & Guo, 2019).

In a second study implemented by Irwin and Hramiak (2010), it is explored how trainee teacher identity is constructed through interactions in online forums using a discourse analysis perspective. The focus of study is on the situated meanings that contribute to install a situated identity within a community of practice. Language and culture are considered the sources of negotiation for identity along with the role of the tutor's power. In their study, Irwin and Hramiak look at the lexis used by the trainee teachers, the tutors, and the students. In their findings, they established that although trainee teachers did a good work in terms of teaching and reported feeling accomplished performing their role, they did not 'feel' like teachers, especially because they were not able to use the 'teaching discourse' they were expected to. The transition from trainee to teacher was negotiated through discourse as they became more familiarized

with teacher vocabulary and practical concepts along with the pedagogical theory they had achieved in their training.

Finally, Christensson (2021) carried out a multiple case study to delve into the way trainee teachers construct their teacher identity as they navigate the institutional and professional contexts faced in their teacher education programs. Through the analysis of conversations on teacher placement and dissertation writing process along with interviews and field notes, Christensson examines how trainee teachers evolve and create their identity as they are required to talk like ‘real teachers’ while discussing issues related to their training and education with tutors and classmates. Through the interviews, the author explores how these student teachers relate interactionally with the professional settings and their professional future. As a conclusion, Christensson states that the construction of a professional teacher identity is a communicative, interactional process that integrates previous experiences and an anticipatory perspective.

In summary, these studies present different situations in which discourse is the main component in the construction of professional teacher identity.

The Narrative Perspective

The main goal of any qualitative study is “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 2). Teachers’ professional identity is usually constructed and mediated by and through the interactions with others in specific contexts and it gives meaning to the teaching profession. Therefore, qualitative research becomes a suitable alternative to explore the construction of professional identity. Based on prior research on teachers’ professional identity development, the narrative approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991) is used in qualitative studies to collect, describe, and analyze the stories about people’s lives and experiences.

According to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), narrative inquiry can be applied in language teaching and learning where research studies mainly focus on teachers’ lives and language learning aspects. For identity studies, Barkhuizen et al. (2014) point out that “narrative inquiry is the only methodology that provides access to language teaching and learning as lived experiences that take place over long periods and in multiple settings and contexts” (p. 13). In sum, narrative inquiry considers learners’ and teachers’ life experiences in specific contexts and brings the emotional dimensions of language that teachers and learners live or experience through their autobiographical accounts.

Narrative studies focus on “a participant’s own voice about a particular topic” (Yin, 2011, p. 65) through the description of their stories told either in oral or written forms (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Creswell, 2012). Nevertheless, some conditions need

to be taken into consideration when conducting a narrative study. These conditions are (a) types of narrative inquiry, (b) the relationship between researchers and participants, and (c) the focus of the research (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

A summary of the main characteristics of narrative inquiry is shown in Figure 1.

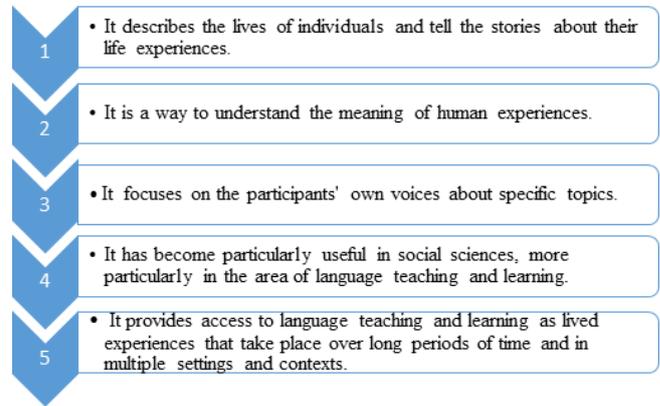


Figure 1. Characteristics of narrative inquiry

Though quantitative and mixed-method approaches have been used to explore teachers' professional identity complexities, existing literature on teachers' professional identity has been predominately qualitative. Research has relied on diverse data collection methods. The most common have been quantitative Likert scales (Chong et al., 2011b; Hennessy & Lynch, 2016; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Živković et al., 2017), metaphors (Karaby, 2016), pedagogical dilemmas (Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013), interviews (Warner, 2016; Afrianto, 2015; Lu, 2005; Riyanti, 2017; Werbińska, 2015), and narratives and narrative frames (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Bolívar et al., 2014; Misfud, 2018; Lu, 2005; Pérez-Valverde & Ruiz-Cecilia, 2013; Xu, 2014).

As shown in this brief review of studies using a diversity of data collection methods, most EFL pre-service teachers' identity research has been conducted in a variety of non-English speaking countries. In light of these existing studies on methodological diversity, it was observed that qualitative and narrative research designs appear to be dominant in teachers' professional identity research. Based on the literature review, among the most common qualitative-narrative data collection techniques are life-story narratives, semi-structured interviews, and narrative frames. Therefore, these three instruments become important sources of data gathering.

Open written narratives or life stories have gained popularity in professional identity studies. For instance, Yüksel and Kavanoz (2015) collected pre-service language teachers' narratives to identify their motivations and concerns regarding their decisions to become teachers by setting six questions including "why did

you choose teaching as a profession?" Other questions related to the time pre-service teachers made the decision, people who influenced them, their motivations for selecting teaching as a profession, and teaching career challenges. Similarly, Pérez-Valverde and Ruiz-Cecilia (2013) used an extensive open narrative during the initial data collection stage to explore pre-service foreign language teachers' professional identity development in a training program in Spain. Pre-service teachers were asked to write an initial narrative recounting the role of teaching and education in their lives by including elements such as early experiences at school, the reasons for choosing the profession, and experiences during the training period. These studies not only used the initial question, "why did you decide to become a teacher?" but used other subtopics or sub-questions to guide pre-service teachers' narration and explore professional identity development.

Narrative frames have been used in previous research on professional identity (Barkhuizen, 2014; Xu, 2013). Barkhuizen (2014) used a narrative frame as part of a more extensive study in New Zealand to identify the problems and achievements of 41 adult migrant and refugee English learners who were starting a home tutoring program. The frame included some general demographic information at the beginning. The narrative frame was then structured in three main parts consisting of 4 or 6 sentence starter prompts. The first part of the narrative frame included past experiences as English language learners. The second part prompted a response that had to do with participants' progress in the present. The third section asked respondents about their English learning in the future. Finally, a free writing space was left so that participants could add any other relevant information to the research.

Another study conducted by Xu (2014) used narrative frames and in-depth interviews to explore EFL teachers' research practices and their identity construction as researchers in China. The narrative frame included 14 statements that covered five broad themes: demographic information, institutional requirements and policies, engagement with research (reading) and in research (doing), motivations for and attitudes toward research, and perceived challenges and solutions. One hundred four teachers completed the instrument. Xu's (2014) methodology research design included three steps: a piloting stage for the narrative frame, the narrative frames' application in an electronic format sent via e-mail, followed by individual interviews with four teachers who had previously answered the narrative frame and were purposefully selected by maximal variation sampling.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were found useful as primary and secondary sources of data collection. The research conducted by Afrianto (2015) aimed to investigate pre-service teachers' professional identity development during the teaching practicum in an English language program in Indonesia.

Similarly, Riyanti (2017) examined how Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers developed their identities during the microteaching class in the 6th semester and the teaching practicum in the 7th semester. Some important questions to explore identity construction were "Tell me about how you decided to become an English teacher?" and "How did you see the roles of micro-teaching and student teaching help you become an English teacher?" Moreover, Lu's (2005) narrative inquiry sought to explore how Asian non-native English speakers (NNES) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in the United States constructed and reconstructed their identities as persons and teachers by teaching. Her narrative interview consisted of five parts, which included different life events. These studies agree that interview protocols are useful in teaching and learning scenarios because they allow to get deeper information about participants' experiences and perceptions and can establish the trustworthiness of the information gathered in the previous narratives.

In sum, by using written narratives, narrative frames, and narrative interview protocols, it is possible to provide additional insight into the development and construction of teachers' professional identity. Relying only on narrative instruments, participants have more opportunities to tell their lived experiences from their perspective, so a deeper understanding of the issue of professional identity may be accomplished.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY STUDIES: THE UANL CONTEXT

The context

The School of Philosophy and Arts at UANL (Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León) offers an EFL teacher preparation program named Language Sciences. The Language Sciences bachelor's degree is divided into 10 semesters that include courses in four main areas: Humanities, Applied Linguistics, Literary Studies, and Educational/Translation Research. University students can choose to minor either in Translation and Interpretation Studies or in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2019). Last year, there were about 1,330 students enrolled in the Language Science program during the semester January-June 2020. The student population is mainly female (80%) than male (20%). However, only 40% of the programs' total population was enrolled in the Teaching English as a Foreign language (EFL) minor, which was the focus of the studies that will be further presented. The EFL teacher preparation program consists of two semesters of core courses among the seven programs and eight semesters of their major given 220 hours/credits. During the eight semester (4 years), EFL pre-service teachers acquire knowledge and skills related to linguistic, didactical, managerial, and pedagogical areas of EFL. At the end of the program, graduates receive a bachelor's degree recognized by the institution and the Mexican

Ministry of Education. The program offers some literature and history courses that complement students' knowledge of the English language's cultural elements (Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2019).

The Discourse Study

Using a multiple case study and the tools of discourse analysis (Yin, 2011; Gee, 2011a, 2011b, 2015), this research study intended to capture the personal and professional experiences of four (4) pre-service bilingual Mexican teachers, who were enrolled in a Bilingual Education/EFL program at the Philosophy and Arts School in UANL. These trainee teachers were carrying out their practicum at the college level and the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how identity of pre-service bilingual teachers was constructed and negotiated through discourse as they became professionals. In doing so, this study also attempted to describe the ways their identity was performed, and their perceptions regarding the impact this process had on their classroom practices.

The study included three in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to delve into the teachers' process of constructing their professional identities and how this process had an impact on their classroom practices. Two participant observations were used to gather field notes on how the teachers practiced their identity and how it evolved along the Fall 2018 semester. Finally, five teacher logs obtained through a class group created and managed through Edmodo® were used to discuss and reflect on the process of becoming a professional educator during their last semester of study at this public university in Northern Mexico.

The bilingual teachers in training positionality was examined through the data obtained from the three aforementioned instruments to determine its influence on how the teacher demonstrated their sense of self in class. Both aspects, the influence of identity construction and positionality (Knight, 2011; Douglas & Nganga, 2013; Arvaja, 2016), are discussed from the teachers' perception. The data obtained through the triangulated instruments was examined using the principles of situated meanings and cultural models proposed by Gee (2006), who explains that from a sociocultural perspective, identity is understood as constructed through active negotiations with others (Gee, 2006; Lantolf, 2009).

Language constitutes a mediation tool used to create meanings in new social and cultural contexts as individuals become members of new communities of practice (CoP). In doing so, an ongoing process of sharing values, beliefs, and roles is enacted; and it is in this process that identity is shaped. This is especially

important in the case of pre-service bilingual teachers; whose negotiated construction of a professional identity is reflected on their own teaching practices (Bustos Flores et al., 2011). Teachers' identity will likely have an impact on their practice; it determines the beliefs they will hold regarding assumptions and perceptions about teaching, learning, students, the school, and the community.

The trainee teachers expressed how they felt acknowledged as 'teachers' when the students they were doing their practicum with labelled them so or when the room teacher provided them with chances to intervene in the classroom life beyond just presenting or conducting part of the lesson; when these student teachers were integrated as part of the CoP of language teachers and their interventions and proposals were taken into consideration.

As a conclusion, it was established that pre-service teachers enact their identity when they reflect on the process of its construction as they situate themselves as members of a community with shared values, meanings, roles, and expected behaviours. This positioning allows them to identify the paths of professional development that they need to engage in to validate their membership. In a micro-level, a more practical one, this positioning prepares them to face the challenges that everyday classroom life posts. They can make decisions about preparing themselves to be better professionals.

The Narrative Study

This study examined professional identity development among 40 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers in the School of Philosophy and Arts at UANL and a private university. It described the development of EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity at the initial, middle, and final stages in their teaching preparation program. It recognized EFL pre-service changes in beliefs about the English teaching profession and their personal and professional traits during teacher education. Moreover, the personal, professional, and social aspects as well as the experiences that contributed to their professional identity development were identified. A sociocultural theoretical lens incorporating Korthagen's (2004) Onion Model of professional identity components was the main theoretical framework for this study.

A narrative qualitative study approach was employed. Data collection process included three narrative instruments applied in three phases. A total of 40 EFL pre-service teachers from two universities (public and private) in Northern Mexico participated in the study. Participants from the three stages of teacher preparation (initial, middle, and final) completed Language Learning Histories (LLHs) open narratives during Phase I of the study as well as narrative frames in Phase II. In Phase III, three narrative interviews with final-year students. A total of 63

narratives were analyzed inductively using MAXQDA and were further codified and categorized in thematic units for a holistic analysis.

The findings of the study showed the important milestones in this group of 40 EFL pre-service teachers through their life and learning experiences before and during teacher education. It was concluded that personal factors influenced EFL pre-service teachers' motivations to choose the profession, while professional and social aspects influenced participants' present and future identity as English teachers. Moreover, results indicated that professional identity was a continuous process that was perceived differently at different stages of teacher preparation, as it relates to EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs, mission, identity, and competencies. Findings showed that both biographical and teacher preparation experiences were equally important in the construction of EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity. However, results indicated that through teacher education, EFL pre-service teachers integrated their previous beliefs into new schemes of thought. This integration helped participants reconcile the conflicts found between what they thought about the profession and what the profession actually is. Finally, EFL pre-service teachers' narratives showed changes at the personal and professional levels at different stages of teacher preparation, but most importantly, in EFL pre-service teachers' previous beliefs about the profession, resulting in a transformation or re-construction of their professional identity as English teachers.

CONCLUSION

Identity construction is an ongoing process in an individual's life, in which language plays a major role. That is, identity and language are inherently connected. As a result of this interrelation, it is suitable to study identity from the discourse and the narrative perspectives in which language use is central (Feng, 2017).

Language is the tool that individuals use for negotiating and constructing identity. Hence, language is the bridge that mediates the process in which a teacher learns to teach by discourse practices. Using the tools of discourse analysis specifically the perspectives of figured worlds and social languages, provides an understanding of how teachers conceptualize their identity and their interpretation of what being a professional educator means.

On the other hand, narratives provide an insight into the experiences and processes that teachers go through in their training that constitute an essential element in the construction of their professional identity. Professional identity is not something we are born with. Through teacher preparation, teachers integrate both the personal and professional selves when learning to teach. In this sense, narratives help teachers

reflect on who they are, who they want to be, and why they are becoming teachers.

Professional identity combines both professional and personal dimensions. From the professional dimension, identity is the result of the interaction of internal forces that are in continuous tension. These forces have to do with the issues that define the individuals in relation to how they define themselves as professionals. Other forces are related to the tensions that are created between future expectations and realities of the teaching profession and how individuals express this in their narratives.

Finally, identity, as a personal dimension, integrates the individuals' life history to the professional qualities pre-service teachers are attaining through teacher education. These dimensions may change over time due to psychological and socio-cultural variables since identity is not just a continuous and fixed entity, but it changes over time and context (Akkerman, & Meijer, 2011; Hamidreza et al., 2019).

Some implications of this topic in teacher education include the following. First, a systematic intervention in the program's pedagogical practices must be addressed. Second, curriculum needs changing in order to include content that supports and nurtures EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity. Third, a pedagogy based on reflective practices must be integrated into the teacher education program. Finally, teacher educators and school supervisors must get engaged and committed to this learning to teach process and realize they are important models that nurture students' minds and students' personal selves. Without these stakeholders' active participation, EFL pre-service teachers will take longer to reconcile the tensions they experience during their teacher preparation, which might bring negative consequences to their future professional development.

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