# GIST

## EDUCATION AND LEARNING RESEARCH JOURNAL

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# Gist
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GiST Education and Learning Research Journal

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# Editorial

**Dr. Carlo Granados-Beltrán**
**Academic Vice Chancellor ÚNICA**

Welcome to a new edition of GiST Journal. The articles published in this issue of the journal offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by English learners and teachers in diverse contexts. The article by **Tevfik Dariyemez** and **Ahmet Erdost Yatsibaş** presents the suggestions of students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to maintain their willingness to communicate in online English lessons. Study participants identified a number of factors that contribute to their willingness to communicate, including interesting topics and activities, understanding teachers, and opportunities for interaction with other students. These findings suggest that online English teachers can encourage students' willingness to communicate by focusing on creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment.

**Cihan Kocabaş** and **Unal Deniz'** article examines the problems faced by novice Turkish teachers in their early career stages. The study findings revealed that novice professors face a number of challenges, including problems with class planning and management, and pressure to meet administrators' expectations. These findings underscore the importance of providing adequate support to novice teachers to succeed in their careers. **Ertan Altınsoy** inquired about the impact of lesson study on the personal development of future English teachers. The study findings revealed that the study of lessons helped future teachers to develop greater self-awareness, improve their teaching skills, and increase their self-confidence. These findings suggest that lesson study can be a valuable tool for the professional development of future English teachers.

**Jhon Eduardo Mosquera Pérez**, **Flor Angela Hurtado Torres** and **Daniel Elías Pérez Díaz** did a collaborative autoethnography to explore the identity-building trajectory of a group of English research professors. The study findings revealed that participating teachers experienced a number of tensions in their process of identity

construction, including the tension between their identities as teachers and researchers, and the tension between their identities as English teachers and as Colombians. These findings suggest that the identity of English teachers is complex and fluid, and that it is influenced by a variety of factors.

**Mary Elizabeth Caballero Guillén** and **Cecilia Cisterna Zenteno** investigated the contribution of information-gap activities to support speech fluency among Honduran ninth-grade students. The study findings revealed that information gap activities helped students improve their speech fluency in terms of speed, interruptions, and repairs. These findings suggest that information-gap activities may be an effective tool for the development of speech fluency in English learners. **Ximena D. Burgin's** article examines the self-informed pedagogy of Ecuadorian pre-service teachers. The study findings suggest that there is a disconnect between the objectives of the pre-service teachers' curriculum and the knowledge that the future teachers feel they will need to be ready to implement in their practice.

The article by **Yemeserach Bayou** and **Tamene Kitila** explores the beliefs and practices of instructors to promote students' critical thinking skills in writing classes. The study findings revealed that participating instructors interpreted critical thinking as the students' ability to use appropriate language and argue logically in their writings. The instructors also identified a number of strategies to promote students' critical thinking skills, introducing it explicitly, incorporating it into the assessment system, and creating scaffolding and providing meaningful topics and appropriate opportunities for students to practice writing. These findings provide relevant insights for the field of English language teaching.

Altogether, these articles offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by English learners and teachers in diverse contexts. The findings of these studies can help researchers, educators, and policymakers to develop strategies to improve English learning and teaching in diverse contexts.

# EFL Students' Suggestions to Maintain Their Willingness to Communicate in Online English Language Lessons[1]

## Sugerencias de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para mantener su disposición a comunicarse en lecciones de inglés en línea

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# Abstract

Willingness to communicate (WTC) enhances proficiency for students of English as a foreign language (EFL) and has become a significant research topic. In the literature, several studies focus on the reasons that affect the WTC of EFL students. Yet, little is known about EFL students' suggestions to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, the present study aims to find out EFL students' suggestions to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. It was designed as a qualitative case study. A group of 40 Turkish EFL students participated in the present study. The data were collected through an open-ended question online, and participants' responses were analyzed thematically. The participants made several suggestions related to lessons, topics, activities, teachers, classrooms, assignments, and programs. The findings were discussed, the limitations of the study were explained, and suggestions for further studies were made.

*Keywords:* Willingness to communicate, online English language lessons, EFL students, suggestions to maintain willingness to communicate

# Resumen

La voluntad de comunicarse (VDC) mejora el dominio de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y se ha convertido en un tema de investigación importante. En la literatura, varios estudios se centran en los motivos que afectan el VDC de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, se sabe poco sobre las sugerencias de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de mantener su VDC en las lecciones de inglés en línea. Por lo tanto, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo conocer las sugerencias de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para mantener su VDC en las lecciones de inglés en línea. Fue diseñado como un estudio de caso cualitativo. En el presente estudio participó un grupo de 40 estudiantes turcos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los datos se recopilaron a través de una pregunta abierta en línea y las respuestas de los participantes se analizaron temáticamente. Los participantes hicieron varias sugerencias relacionadas con lecciones, temas, actividades, maestros, aulas, tareas y programas. Se discutieron los hallazgos, se explicaron las limitaciones del estudio y se hicieron sugerencias para estudios adicionales.

*Palabras clave:* Voluntad de comunicarse, lecciones de inglés en línea, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, sugerencias para mantener la disposición de comunicarse.

# Resumo

A disposição para se comunicar (DPC) aprimora a proficiência para estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) e tornou-se um tópico significativo de pesquisa. Na literatura, vários estudos se concentram nas razões que afetam a (DPC) dos estudantes de EFL. No entanto, pouco se sabe sobre as sugestões dos estudantes de EFL para manter sua (DPC) em aulas online de inglês. Portanto, o presente estudo tem como objetivo descobrir as sugestões dos estudantes de EFL para manter sua (DPC) em aulas online de inglês. Foi projetado como um estudo de caso qualitativo. Um grupo de 40 estudantes turcos de EFL participou do presente estudo. Os dados foram coletados por meio de uma pergunta aberta online, e as respostas dos participantes foram analisadas tematicamente. Os participantes fizeram várias sugestões relacionadas a aulas, tópicos, atividades, professores, salas de aula, tarefas e programas. Os resultados foram discutidos, as limitações do estudo foram explicadas, e sugestões para estudos futuros foram feitas.

*Palavras-chave***:** Disposição para comunicar, aulas online de língua inglesa, estudantes de EFL, sugestões para manter a disposição para comunicar.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) plays a significant role in the development of English language skills of English as a foreign language (EFL) students in face-to-face and online English language lessons because they are usually required to use English to express their opinions, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. It is also part of student participation essential for language learning (Cao, 2011). Therefore, it becomes significant to understand what WTC is and which factors can affect EFL students' WTC in face-to-face and online English language lessons, which is explained by reviewing several studies which focus on those factors. The context of these studies is mainly traditional L2 classrooms and more recently online learning environments.

Willingness to Communicate

WTC was coined in the literature by McCroskey and Baer in 1985 based on Burgoon's (1976) study that explored unwillingness to communicate in the first language (L1) and basically meant eagerness to initiate and pursue a conversation in L1 (as cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998). Then, in the 1990s, WTC in the second language (L2) started to become popular. WTC in L2 is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547). Before moving to the studies conducted on WTC in face-to-face and online L2 learning environments, this section will discuss the importance of WTC in L2 learning.

## Willingness to Communicate in Second Language Learning

As MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued, WTC in L2 has a more complex system to decipher than WTC in L1, and knowledge or competence in a language is the determining factor in lowering or increasing WTC. If L2 students have low language competency, they are expected to have less WTC. Shao and Gao (2016) also argued that WTC in L2 depends more on the situation than WTC in L1 because the WTC levels of L2 students may fluctuate significantly due to the language domain. To illustrate, students are less likely to initiate a conversation in English in a situation in which they are bored, sad, sleepy, anxious, or distracted or they are not interested in the topics discussed in the courses (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Such behavior is acceptable, but what sounds alarming is when students prefer to remain reticent about answering questions or joining classroom discussions habitually (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

WTC is crucial to initiate a conversation in L2 (Kang, 2005). Also, L2 students with high WTC could get the chance to increase the frequency of practicing English speaking both in- and out-of-classroom (Kang, 2005). As a result, it plays a pivotal role in L2 development.

## Theoretical Framework of L2 Willingness to Communicate

The importance of situational WTC in L2 learning environments is evident, and theories to conceptualize L2 WTC rely heavily on these situational variables (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998). To demonstrate the factors that affect L2 WTC, MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a model for L2 WTC composed of "communication behavior, behavioral intention, situated antecedents of communication, motivational propensities, the affective and cognitive context, and the societal and individual context" (p.547). According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), the first one, communication behavior, refers to a person's willingness to look for opportunities to communicate and make communication, the second one, behavioral intention, is related to whether he/she wants to behave by using a L2, the third one indicates his/her will to make communication with other people and his/her situational self-confidence, the fourth one focuses on his/her motivation toward other people and groups and self-confidence in L2, the fifty one deals with his/her attitudes toward different groups, the type of social situations he/she is in, and his/her communicative competence, and the last one is based on the atmosphere/climate between different groups and his/her personality. These variables could be influenced by one another and have an interrelated effect on L2 WTC (Yashima, 2002).

## Studies on Willingness to Communicate in English Language Teaching

There have been numerous studies conducted on WTC in L2 (refers to English hereafter) internationally. These studies mainly focus on the factors that can affect WTC in traditional L2 classrooms and more recently in online learning environments. These studies list both trait-like and state-like variables that can either increase or decrease WTC. WTC among L2 learners is closely related to the English proficiency levels of students (Tan & Phariot, 2018), self-confidence (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Şener, 2014), pleasant classroom atmosphere (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), motivation (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019), anxiety (Dewaele, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), previous negative experiences (Kruk, 2019), methods and strategies applied in language teaching (Cao, 2011; Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022), technostress, which is what Brod (1984) defined as "a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with new computer technologies in a healthy manner"(p. 16), (Kruk, 2021; Lee & Liu, 2022; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), and psychology (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Zhang et al., 2022).

This set of factors that affect levels of WTC is interconnected, and their outcomes vary greatly. Due to the dynamic nature of WTC, these factors are also quite

unpredictable and may change depending on a specific learning environment (Kruk, 2021).

Tan and Phairot (2018) argued that there is a correlation between students' proficiencies and their WTC levels. Students who are proficient users of English are also those with high WTC, and such students tend to perform better on exams (Zhang et al., 2022) and being successful contributes to the L2 self-confidence of students. Students with L2 self-confidence tend to have high WTC (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021). In fact, the most striking variable that affects WTC in the activities done in the class is self-confidence (Şener, 2014). Being L2 competent and self-confident may not be sufficient for high WTC without a pleasant learning atmosphere. This could explain why research shows L2 learners are more willing to practice English speaking outside the classroom than in the classroom (Başöz & Erten, 2018; Isma & Baharuddin, 2022). As a result, the significance of a pleasant classroom atmosphere in increasing L2 WTC is evident (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022).

For Dewaele (2019), a pleasant classroom atmosphere is a non-threatening setting where mistakes are tolerated, and students feel free to use the target language. In a study conducted by Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022), positive behaviors of peers or interlocutors and open-minded and approachable language teachers were found to increase the WTC levels of students considerably. It is indisputable that language teachers are partially responsible for creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere, both traditional and online through some pedagogical and technical supports (Lee & Liu, 2022); however, they may need to be supported and trained on how to accomplish that (Aomt et al., 2020). Moreover, students are eager to speak more if they are surrounded by friendly students with high WTC (Kruk, 2021). Their friends may encourage them to speak, or they may get motivated to speak when they see that their friends are willing to speak. Not surprisingly, having higher motivation levels is another factor that affects L2 WTC as students with higher instrumental motivation are also those with higher WTC levels (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019).

Research shows that foreign language classroom anxiety can decrease WTC (Dewaele, 2019). The studies conducted in online or hybrid L2 learning environments claim that students often feel less anxious in online settings and tend to have higher WTC compared to traditional classroom settings (Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022). This finding can be explained in various ways. Students may feel less anxious about making mistakes in online settings, and using avatars may create an anxiety-free learning environment which may give the courage to introverted students and help them boost their L2 WTC (Kruk, 2021). Moreover, Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022) argue that shy students may feel more comfortable in online classrooms where they are not required to open their cameras while practicing English speaking.

Another factor that affects their L2 WTC is the quality of the speaking practices, that is, whether a student has positive or negative experiences in speaking. Previous negative experiences in speaking practices could distort the interest and motivation of students and thus lower their WTC (Kruk, 2019). However, positive experiences when they see that they can understand what is being said in L2 may build their confidence and help them become more eager to talk (Kruk, 2021). On the other hand, having little or no background knowledge about the topics being discussed may result in negative experiences (Kang, 2005). Obviously, students tend to speak more if they are provided with interesting topics and tasks (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022) and talk more about the topics they know well.

Another crucial factor that can influence WTC levels in EFL classrooms is methods and strategies applied by language teachers. For example, allocating additional time to interactive activities may increase the L2 WTC levels of students (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019). Organizing one-to-one or group work activities while practising engaging activities seems to require decisions with precision. Kruk (2021) noted that while group work activities are enjoyed by many interlocutors, one-to-one activities are preferred by others. Language teachers need to be careful while merging in-class activities with out-of-class activities that could help students become autonomous. Cao (2011) argued that group size matters in classroom activities in order not to get lost while reaching every student. Students may get more excited while talking in front of a group of people (Kang, 2005). Kaufmann and Tatum (2018) warned that when students feel they receive fair opportunities and treatment in online instruction, this could help them like their teacher and increase their WTC.

Technostress, which is "a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with new computer technologies in a healthy manner" (Brod, 1984, p. 16), could be another reason that decreases WTC. Studies that explored the WTC levels of EFL students in online education in Thailand (Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022) and in China (Lee & Liu, 2022) revealed that students experienced a sort of technostress. Both studies reported that technical issues such as poor internet connection or power cuts faced during online learning experiences resulted in low WTC. In fact, some students in the study could not hear other interlocutors well due to some technical issues, and some had difficulties in learning about an online platform, such as Second Life, which is a virtual world program thanks to which language learners can create their own avatars and interact with native speakers to improve their English (Kruk, 2021).

As MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) argued, the psychological state of a person may affect his/her WTC level. A happy person may have a higher WTC level than a sad person. While studying what increases or decreases L2 WTC, Zhang et al. (2022) stressed the significance of psychological aspects that affect language learning. Individual learner differences matter considerably, and they could result in fluctuation in the L2 WTC of students due to its dynamic nature.

To sum up, it might be wrong to attribute WTC levels of EFL students to only one factor such as personality or a situation since WTC can be affected by the joint influence of various factors (Cao, 2011). As Kruk (2021) argued, WTC has a dynamic nature, and it may be misleading to consider all these factors as positive or negative all the time.

## Aim of the Research and Research Question

According to the literature review, the reasons that influence the WTC of EFL students have been studied, but there is little information about how to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine student suggestions for the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons by posing the following open-ended research question: "What do you want to be done to maintain your WTC in online English language lessons?"

# Methodology

## Research design

The present study was designed as a qualitative case study which aimed to research a modern phenomenon (i.e., EFL students' suggestions to maintain their willingness to communicate in online English language lessons) in its real context (i.e., in online English language lessons) as Yin (2009) mentioned.

## Participants

There were 40 Turkish EFL students (37 females and 3 males) at a Turkish university who participated in the present study. Their ages were between 18 and 38. Their level of English was B1, and they were studying English.

## Data collection instrument

The data were collected online through one open-ended question. It asked students "What do you want to be done to maintain your WTC in online English language lessons? Explain."

## Data analysis

There were 40 students when the data were collected online. All of these students answered the question individually. While twelve participants made one suggestion in their responses, the rest shared at least two suggestions in their responses to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The collected responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. The responses of the participant EFL students to the open-ended question were read many times, several sub-themes emerged from the student responses, and these sub-themes were placed under main themes depending on the similarities between them. Then, the findings were presented according to the themes and were interpreted in consensus with the data analysis. The themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 1 below.

*Table 1.* The Themes and Sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes |
| --- | --- |
| Lesson-related suggestions | Varying the way online English language lessons are taught |
| | Shortening the length of online English language lessons |
| | Changing the nature of online English language lessons |
| | Accelerating the pace of online English language lessons |
| Topic-related suggestions | Changing the nature of the topics |
| | Varying the content of the topics |
| Activity-related suggestion | Changing the nature of the activities |
| Teacher-related suggestions | Encouraging students to participate |
| | Having positive attitudes |
| Classroom-related suggestions | Creating intimacy in online English language lessons |
| | Reducing the number of students in online English language lessons |
| | Increasing student participation |
| Assignment-related suggestions | Reducing the number of assignments |
| | Giving assignments |
| | Changing the nature of the assignments |
| Program-related suggestion | Designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English |

## Trustworthiness

In-depth robust descriptions were used to make the present study more valid. That is, the findings were presented with the quotations of the participant EFL students.

# Findings

The present study's findings were presented according to the themes developed from the student responses in order: lesson-related, topic-related, activity-related, teacher-related, classroom-related, assignment-related, and program-related suggestions.

## Theme 1: Lesson-related suggestions

The first theme is lesson-related suggestions because, according to the responses of the participants, online English language lessons seem to influence the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons. Online English language lessons appear to affect the maintenance of WTC because the participants' responses focus on several aspects of online English language lessons which are the way online English language lessons are taught, the length of online English language lessons, the pace of online English language lessons, and the nature of online English language lessons. As a result, lesson-related suggestions are sub-themed as (a) varying the way online English language lessons are taught, (b) shortening the length of online English language lessons, (c) changing the nature of online English language lessons, and (d) accelerating the pace of online English language lessons.

### Sub-theme 1: Varying the way online English language lessons are taught

The way online English language lessons are made seems to impact the maintenance of some participants in online English language lessons negatively if it is monotonous and repetitive (i.e., the lesson is always taught using the same ways). Therefore, to maintain WTC in online English language lessons, it was suggested that the way online English language lessons are taught should be varied. The following quotations clearly show this.

Participant (P) 1: "After a certain point, our attention is distracted in the lesson. There should not be monotony in lessons."

P3: "Changes can be made in the way lessons are taught."

P36: "… using different ways to get more efficiency from the lesson and increase willingness to participate…"

### *Sub-theme 2: Shortening the length of online English language lessons*

The length of online English language lessons appears to have a negative effect on maintaining WTC in online English language lessons if it is long. Therefore, shortening the length of online English language lessons was recommended by three participants. The quotations below support this.

P2: "Lessons should be short, but efficient."

P6: "Some lessons are too long, and this causes distraction."

P19: "… and that lessons should not last long."

### *Sub-theme 3: Changing the nature of online English language lessons*

If online English languages are boring and uninteresting and if students feel uncomfortable in online English language lessons, the WTC of the participants seems to be affected negatively, so the nature of online English language lessons may affect the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons negatively. As a result, it was recommended that online English language lessons should be made fun, interesting, and comfortable for students to maintain their WTC in online English language classes. The following quotations illustrate this.

P19: "… that lessons become more fun."

P24: "Making lessons more interesting."

P23: "I think the teacher should teach in a way that comforts students more."

P36: "… making lessons more interesting can help this situation to alleviate."

Sub-theme 4: Accelerating the pace of online English language lessons

The pace of online English language lessons might influence the maintenance of the participants negatively in online English language lessons if the pace is not fast. it can be suggested that the pace of online English language lessons should become fast by P40 who implied this suggestion by writing "And that the lesson is taught very slowly becomes boring."

## Theme 2: Topic-related suggestions

The second theme was topic-related suggestions since the topics studied in online English language lessons appear to impact the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons negatively if they do not get the participants' attention. The participants' responses concentrate on the nature and content of the topics studied in online English language lessons, so this main theme is sub-themed as (a) changing the nature of the topics and (b) varying the content of the topics.

### *Sub-theme 1: Changing the nature of the topics*

According to some participants, if the nature of the topics in online English language lessons does not catch their attention, their WTC may be affected negatively, so they may not maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, they recommended studying more interesting, modern, and fun topics in online English language lessons for the maintenance of their WTC in such lessons. To illustrate:

P5: "…or we can make conversations about topics that we are interested in every week."

P7: "…making the topic talked about more fun with video and visuals…"

P27: "Up-to-date topics should be mentioned."

P31: "… and we can be asked to study the topics that catch our interest."

P32: "In lessons, more interesting topics can be practiced."

### *Sub-theme 2: Varying the content of the topics*

Like the nature of the topics, the content of the topics studied in online English language lessons may have a negative effect on the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons if it does not get their attention. Consequently, varying the content of the topics studied in online English language lessons was suggested to maintain WTC in online English language lessons by two participants in their responses below.

P11: "… totally talking about daily life, studying daily speaking structures."

P39: "… at least different and fun contents can be provided to gather students' attention."

Theme 3: Activity-related suggestion

The third theme is the activity-related suggestion since like the topics studied in online English language lessons, the activities used in such lessons seem to impact the maintenance of the WTC of the participants negatively if they do not grab their attention because of being uninteresting, old, boring, and so on. As the responses of the participants focus on the nature of the activities used in online English language lessons, changing the nature of the activities is placed under this theme as its only sub-theme.

### *Sub-theme 1: Changing the nature of the activities*

The nature of activities in an online English language lesson catches the attention of the participants by being interesting, fun, beautiful, and so on, yet if it does not, according to some participants, they may not maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Consequently, the nature of the activities used in online English

language lessons was recommended to be changed by making them more interesting, fun, up-to-date, participative, and different. To demonstrate:

P7: "By choosing more up-to-date and fun activities that can catch our interest…"

P14: "That there are more fun and interesting activities can be good."

P17: "More different activities can be done for efficient lessons."

P18: "Some activities that can make the lesson more fun can be done."

P21: "There can be activities in which students can participate more in lessons."

## Theme 4: Teacher-related suggestions

The fourth theme is teacher-related suggestions because English language teachers in online English language classes seem to have a direct effect on the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons through their attitudes and behaviors in online English language lessons. Since the focus of the participants' responses is on teachers' behaviors and attitudes, this theme is sub-themed as (a) encouraging students to participate and (b) having positive attitudes.

### *Sub-theme 1: Encouraging students to participate*

According to some participants, if English language teachers encourage them to participate through their behaviors, such as giving students the right to talk, in online English language lessons, they can maintain their WTC in such lessons, but if they do not, the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons may be affected negatively. The quotations below indicate this:

P5: "… or if individual rights to talk are given to everybody, it can become more interesting."

P7: "By choosing more up-to-date and fun activities that can catch our interest, having students comment about them in the lessons, that students express their opinions, … will maintain the participation of all students, including me, in the lesson."

P26: "It is not difficult to communicate in general, but for continuity, I think opportunities should be given like in the speaking lessons."

P28: "I want teachers to give the individuals the right to speak by saying names in the lesson."

P33: "… but if turning on his/her microphone is asked obligatorily, the student turns on his/her microphone obligatorily."

P34: "Encouraging students to talk more."

P35: "I think the fact that teachers choose the student [to talk] can be good…"

### Sub-theme 2: Having positive attitudes

English language teachers' attitudes in online English language lessons appear to have an influence on the maintenance of their WTC in such lessons because, according to some participants, positive attitudes seem to contribute to the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons. The quotations below show this.

P4: "[Teachers] should become understanding and provide easiness."

P29: "A concerned teacher's helping students during the process of focusing on the lesson, …, making students not feel afraid of making mistakes intimately, building trust in this issue."

P30: "… our teachers' encouraging us to speak through our microphone can increase this willingness. Teachers' more motivative, that is, encouraging approaches can increase this willingness."

P37: "That teachers become more understanding has a more effective role in this situation [WTC]."

## Theme 5: Classroom-related suggestions

The fifth theme is classroom-related suggestions because online English language classrooms appear to have an impact on the maintenance of the participants' WTC through its environment, its size, and the rate of student participation since the responses of the participants concentrate on these three classroom-related issues. As a result, the followings are placed under this theme as its sub-themes: (a) creating intimacy in online English language lessons, (b) reducing the number of students in online English language lessons, and (c) increasing student participation.

### Sub-theme 1: Creating intimacy in online English language lessons

Three participants mentioned that if the environment or atmosphere in an online English language lesson is not intimate, they may not maintain their WTC in that lesson because intimacy in an online lesson seems to trigger student WTC in that lesson. Thus, creating intimacy in online English language lessons was suggested by three participants. To demonstrate:

P12: "I think … and forming an intimate environment like a face-to-face classroom environment will be good."

P16: "There may be a more intimate environment."

### Sub-theme 2: Reducing the number of students in online English language lessons

The size of the classroom seems to influence two participants' WTC negatively in online English language lessons if it is crowded, so these participants suggested

reducing the number of students in online English language lessons to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The quotations below indicate this.

P11: "Talking with fewer students…"
P12: "I think having lessons with fewer students and … will be good"

### Sub-theme 3: Increasing student participation

Low student participation in online English language lessons appears to reduce the WTC of two participants in such lessons, high student participation seems to contribute to their WTC. Hence, to maintain WTC in online English language lessons, they recommended increasing student participation in online English language lessons. To indicate:

P10: "I wish there had been a more active class."
P13: "Lessons become more fun when more students participate."

## Theme 6: Assignment-related suggestions

The sixth theme is assignment-related suggestions because like the topics studied and activities used in online English language lessons, assignments appear to influence three participants' WTC in such classes depending on their number, content, and being given. Since the participants' responses focus on the number of assignments, their content, and whether they are given or not, this theme is sub-themed as (a) reducing the number of assignments, (b) giving assignments, and (c) changing the nature of the assignments.

### Sub-theme 1: Reducing the number of assignments

If the number of assignments is high in online English language lessons, the WTC of P22 who wrote "… and I am not in favor of giving many assignments. When many assignments are given, we get bored" is affected negatively and so is the maintenance of her WTC in online English language lessons. Thus, reducing the number of assignments was recommended to maintain her WTC in online English language lessons.

### Sub-theme 2: Giving assignments

When assignments are not given in online English language lessons, the WTC of P31 who wrote "Assignments can be given" may be affected negatively, and so may the maintenance of her WTC in online English language lessons. Thus, giving assignments was suggested for the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons.

### Sub-theme 3: Changing the nature of the assignments

The nature of the assignments seems to affect WTC in online English language lessons because P9 who wrote "I think that assignments should be based on practice more" wanted to be given practice-based assignments to maintain her WTC in online English language lessons. Hence, changing the nature of the assignments could be recommended for the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons.

## Theme 7: Program-related suggestion

The last theme is the program-related suggestion because like the other parts of online English language lessons, such as topics, activities, and assignments, an English language program applied in an online English language lesson seems to impact one participant's WTC in online English language lessons. Depending on the response of P38, one sub-theme is placed under this theme. It is designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English.

### Sub-theme 1: Designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English

If the level of an English language program used in an online English language lesson is not relevant to the English levels of the students, the WTC of P38 is influenced negatively because she wrote "I think designing a program according to the level of the class after determining it is necessary." Thus, she suggested designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English to maintain her WTC in online English language classes.

## Discussion

To maintain their WTC in online English language lessons, the participants offered some lesson-related suggestions such as using diverse techniques to relieve the monotony, making lessons more interesting and fun, comforting students, and teaching at a faster pace in a shorter lesson time to avoid boredom. The response related to using diverse techniques to relieve the monotony shows the importance of methods and strategies applied in language teaching in increasing WTC (Cao, 2011; Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022) because the use of different methods and strategies can avoid monotony in lessons and make lessons more fun and interesting. Also, long online English language lessons might distract the participants, so they might be demotivated to communicate in English. Consequently, English language teachers may follow the lesson-related suggestions in their online English language teaching practices to promote their students' WTC.

The findings of the present study have also indicated that the topics studied in online English language teaching matter. The participants asked for different and fun content that involves interesting and up-to-date topics. This finding is in line with the literature which argues that students tend to speak more if they are provided with interesting topics and tasks (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Therefore, English language teachers may opt for topics that are both engaging and interesting to maintain their students' WTC in online English language lessons.

Moreover, the findings of the present study have shown that choosing attractive topics is not complete without delivering them through interesting, fun, diverse, up-to-date, and engaging activities. The activity-related suggestions made by the participants could increase students' motivation, which is required for keeping WTC high (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019) and is in line with literature that stresses the significance of interactive activities for WTC in English language lessons (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019). Similarly, English language teachers may explore various interesting and engaging activities to boost motivation and keep their students' WTC high in online English language lessons.

Probably the largest responsibility lies on the shoulders of English language teachers. The findings of this study have clearly illustrated that they have a pivotal role in increasing their students' WTC in online English language lessons by being understanding, providing easiness, giving students adequate time and opportunities to talk and express their opinions, encouraging them to speak more, building trust, and making students turn on their microphones in online English teaching. This finding serves as a contributor to building a classroom community because such behaviors can help students feel more secure and comfortable, so their belonging to the classroom community can enhance, which can increase and maintain their WTC in online English language lessons.

In addition to English language teachers, classroom size and atmosphere matter. According to the findings of the present study, the suggestions of the participants related to classrooms involved an intimate classroom atmosphere, small class size, and an active learning environment. This finding supports the importance of a pleasant classroom atmosphere which can increase L2 students' WTC (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022). Similarly, by following the classroom-related suggestions of the participants, English language teachers can create a pleasant classroom atmosphere in their classes, which can motivate the participants to communicate more.

The final remarks made by participants involve the features of assignments and the program to be followed. As understood from the findings of the present study, the participants preferred to be given assignments, especially the ones that are practical and that would not be an overload. They also added that the program (i.e., the syllabus or curriculum) should be designed in accordance with their English levels. Easy tasks

may be boring, and more difficult ones may be demotivating. To build self-confidence, students need to see that they progress and can achieve things in English. This finding matters as students with L2 self-confidence tend to have high WTC (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021). As a result, English language teachers should be well aware of the levels of their students and apply differentiated instruction which may include interactive assignments to build the L2 confidence of their students at different L2 competencies.

To sum up, though the participants' suggestions focus on different aspects of online English language lessons, it can be said that these aspects are interrelated. That is, an English language program decides the topic to be studied in an online English language lesson which determines the activities to be done, the assignment to be given, and the instructional methods to be used for teaching, so if the topic does not catch the attention of students, the assignment and the activities may also be uninteresting for students, which may lead to a boring classroom atmosphere. As a result, students may not maintain their WTC in that online English language lesson. Therefore, the aspects of online English language lessons on which participants' suggestions focus can be said to have a sort of joint effect on students' WTC in online English language lessons, so their suggestions should be considered as a whole.

## Conclusion

The focus of the present study has been on the suggestions that EFL students made to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The findings of the present study have indicated that the suggestions of the participants to be used for maintaining their WTC in online English language lessons were related to lessons, topics, activities, teachers, classrooms, assignments, and programs.

The present study has two weaknesses/limitations. The first one is its research context (i.e., at a university), and the second one is the number of participants (i.e., 40 participants). Future studies can be conducted with more participants in different research contexts by using the same methodology so that a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation in the present study can be obtained.

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# Turkish Novice Teachers' Struggles for Teaching and Learning to Teaching[1]

## Las luchas de los profesores novatos turcos por la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la enseñanza

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## Research Article

## Abstract

This research aims to determine teachers' problems in the early stages of their careers and to offer solutions. In this context, the research is a phenomenological study of 21 teachers selected by maximum variety sampling. The study's data were obtained through semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researchers with the opinions of six experts. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the teachers who participated in the study. The content analysis method was preferred in analyzing the obtained data, and NVivo 11 software was used. The findings of the study revealed that the problems faced by teachers include the learning-teaching process, educational structure and opportunities, individual and environmental factors, and education stakeholders. The research ends with various research and application suggestions by drawing attention to some points in preventing the problems that teachers encounter in the early stages of their careers.

**Keywords:** Early Career Teachers, Problems Encountered by Teachers, Novice Teachers, Phenomenological Study, Struggles for Teaching, Teaching Profession.

## Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo determinar los problemas de los docentes en las primeras etapas de sus carreras y ofrecer soluciones. En este contexto, la investigación es un estudio fenomenológico de 21 profesores seleccionados mediante muestreo de máxima variedad. Los datos del estudio se obtuvieron a través de preguntas de entrevistas semiestructuradas preparadas por los investigadores con las opiniones de seis expertos. Se realizaron entrevistas cara a cara con los profesores que participaron en el estudio. Se prefirió el método de análisis de contenido para analizar los datos obtenidos y se utilizó el software NVivo 11. Los hallazgos del estudio revelaron que los problemas enfrentados por los docentes incluyen el proceso de aprendizaje-enseñanza, la estructura y oportunidades educativas, los factores individuales y ambientales, y los actores educativos. La investigación concluye con varias sugerencias de investigación y aplicación al llamar la atención sobre algunos puntos para prevenir los problemas que los docentes encuentran en las primeras etapas de sus carreras.

**Palabras clave:** Docentes Principiantes, Problemas Enfrentados por los Docentes, Profesores Noveles, Profesión Docente.

# Resumo:

Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo determinar os problemas enfrentados por professores nos estágios iniciais de suas carreiras e oferecer soluções. Nesse contexto, a pesquisa é um estudo fenomenológico com 21 professores selecionados por amostragem de máxima variedade. Os dados do estudo foram obtidos por meio de perguntas de entrevistas semiestruturadas preparadas pelos pesquisadores com as opiniões de seis especialistas. Entrevistas presenciais foram conduzidas com os professores que participaram do estudo. O método de análise de conteúdo foi preferido na análise dos dados obtidos, e o software NVivo 11 foi utilizado. Os resultados do estudo revelaram que os problemas enfrentados pelos professores incluem o processo de ensino-aprendizagem, estrutura educacional e oportunidades, fatores individuais e ambientais, e partes interessadas na educação. A pesquisa conclui com várias sugestões de pesquisa e aplicação, chamando a atenção para alguns pontos na prevenção dos problemas que os professores enfrentam nos estágios iniciais de suas carreiras.

*Palavras-chave:* Professores Iniciantes, Problemas Enfrentados por Professores, Professores Novatos, Estudo Fenomenológico, Desafios no Ensino, Profissão Docente.

# Introduction

The performance of teachers in educational institutions significantly affects the quality of education and educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Rivkin et al., 2005). In this regard, it can be stated that it is important for teachers to determine their own competencies, take into account their interests, needs, and expectations, establish their vision, identify their forward-looking goals, make plans and programs to achieve these goals, and make efforts. Striving to achieve these goals in the context of teachers' careers contributes to increasing their motivation, strengthening the psychological contract between them and their organizations, developing themselves professionally, and gaining social status (Altunışık, 2010; Chirichello & Bailey, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

There are theories and studies in the relevant literature that acknowledge the common developmental stages observed during teachers' professional careers, where teachers exhibit different attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors at various points in their careers (Day, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Huberman, 1989; Lynn, 2002; Sikes, 1985). Huberman (1989, p.41) identifies three career stages that form a teacher's life cycle. The first of these, and also the focus of research, is the novice career stage, where an individual is struggling to adapt and cope in an unfamiliar environment. Additionally, novice teachers in this stage are known to be less aware of the demands and expectations of the community and students, and they carry the burden of proving their competency in the teaching profession. The career entry stage is defined as the first few years when a teacher is integrated into the system. During this period, new teachers try to gain acceptance from students, colleagues, and other educational stakeholders while attempting to find solutions to problems and striving to achieve a level of comfort and security (Burke, 1984, p. 14-15). Teachers' career entry stages encompass professional skills, behaviors, attitudes, teaching methods, discipline strategies, curriculum, planning, rules and procedures, professional confidence and safety, values, and beliefs. Knowledge of this developmental process sheds light on teaching and teacher development, serving as a foundation for teachers (Burden, 1982; Thompson, 2018; Wong & Wong, 2018). Moreover, the first years of the profession hold the potential to influence the teacher's career journey, effectiveness, and job satisfaction (Paula & Grinfelde, 2018).

During the entry-level stage of their career, teachers must cope with numerous crisis situations. Novice teachers experience various difficulties due to the diversity of student characteristics and the challenging nature of the teaching profession (Bakioğlu & Korumaz, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Santoro, 2015). They struggle to assess both their students and the requirements of their job accurately (Durmaz, 2014) while also spending their time and energy to understand the classroom environment and develop teaching strategies. In this context, research conducted in

different contexts has revealed the problems that novice teachers encounter, including classroom management and discipline issues (Melekhina & Ivleva, 2020; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Sikes, 1985; Wolf, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2021), insufficient teaching materials (Sali & Kecik, 2018), lesson planning (Karacaoğlu & Acar, 2010; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018), exam preparation and student assessment (Paula & Grinfelde, 2018), and communication with parents (Meister & Melnick, 2003; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018).

In the context of Türkiye, existing research has identified the problems experienced by novice teachers as classroom management and discipline issues (Doğan, 2016; Ergünay, 2018; Çiğil, 2014; Kozikoğlu, 2016; Öztürk, 2008), low salaries (Çiğil, 2014), lack of professional respect (Çiğil, 2014; Öztürk, 2008), frequently changing teaching programs and regulations (Bekdemir, 2018; Ergünay, 2018; Çiğil, 2014), problems in planning and implementing teaching (Bekdemir, 2018; Doğan, 2016), inadequate physical infrastructure and facilities in schools (Ergünay, 2018; Çiğil, 2014; Kozikoğlu, 2016), inability to find opportunities for professional development (Doğan, 2016; Ergünay, 2018), excessive workload (Bekdemir, 2018; Öztürk, 2008), housing (Çiğil, 2014), social and cultural adaptation issues (Doğan, 2016), inability to establish healthy communication with students (Bekdemir, 2018), and lack of support from administrators and colleagues (Bekdemir, 2018; Doğan, 2016; Çiğil, 2014; Öztürk, 2008).

While these findings provide valuable insights into the problems faced by novice teachers, it is noteworthy that the increasing number of private schools and the proportion of teachers working in private schools (~15%) in Türkiye, particularly since 2016 with government incentives (MoNE, 2016), needs attention (MoNE, 2022). Therefore, the exclusion of teachers working in private schools from these studies is a significant limitation. Additionally, the diversity of the teaching levels and professional fields of the teachers in these studies (e.g., special education, vocational and technical education teachers) was not adequately rich. At this point, there is a need for more comprehensive research on the problems encountered by novice teachers in the Turkish context. This study addresses the problems encountered by novice teachers working at various teaching levels and different branches in both public and private schools. The results of this research are expected to provide awareness and insight into potential problems that new teachers may encounter and their solutions. Moreover, the obtained results are evaluated as guiding education managers and policymakers in preventing or reducing the impact of problems that teachers face in the early stages of their careers.

## Understanding the Teaching Profession in Türkiye

Teacher training in Türkiye is a topic that can be traced back to the final years of the Ottoman Empire. In the late 19th century, the Teacher Education Institute (Darülmuallimin-i Aliye) was established as an institution for training teachers who would primarily work at the high school level, and it was designed to be completed four years after secondary education. This school, later renamed as the Higher Teachers' School, expanded its scope by adding new departments. These schools, which continued to train teachers until about forty years ago, then passed the responsibility of teacher education to the Education Institutes. In 1982, with Law Decree No. 41 dated July 20, 1982, the task of training teachers was transferred from the ministry to universities, and some of the education institutes were transformed into education faculties (Aydın, 1998; Argün, 2008; Kavcar, 2002). However, this transformation did not put an end to the debates regarding the overall education system in Türkiye and the quality of teachers, in particular (Kavak, 1999).

The Post-Service Teacher Training Project, which was carried out in collaboration between the Higher Education Council and the World Bank between 1994-1998, led to the restructuring process of Education Faculties (Argün, 2008). In 1994, the "HEC/ World Bank Post-Service Teacher Training Project" was initiated by the Ministry of National Education, the Higher Education Council, and the World Bank using the loans provided by the World Bank. The project, which benefited from the contributions of participating experts, was concluded in 1998. The education model developed for teacher candidates aimed to increase teacher qualifications by providing participation in various certificate programs, and it also aimed to make the delivery of science and literature courses in faculties more effective. According to the model, some teachers in certain teaching fields started to receive undergraduate-level education, while some started to receive graduate-level education (Okçabol, 2004). However, since the implementation of the model developed at the end of the project until today, there have been ongoing issues related to the quality of teacher training due to various reasons such as excess enrollment, shortage of teaching staff, insufficient infrastructure, and the continuation of opening new education faculties despite these challenges, which have had negative effects on the quality of teacher training (Ayas, 2009). In the 1990s, the Ministry of National Education assigned a large number of graduates to schools as class teachers regardless of their fields of study in order to meet the existing teacher needs. For example, in 1998, 41,000 graduate teachers from non-education faculties were employed. These types of assignments, which have negative impacts on the teaching profession and reputation, have also brought along quality issues (Albayrak, 2018; Baskan, 2001; Özdemir, 2017).

After the 2000s, it appears that the operation of institutions that train teachers has been determined by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The General Directorate of Teacher Training, which is

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part of MoNE, is the unit that determines policies and regulations related to teacher training. Currently, Education Faculties are the leading institutions that train teachers in Türkiye (Şendağ, 2015). According to statistics from CoHE, as of 2022, there are 103 Education Faculties (Faculties of Education, Faculties of Education Sciences, Faculties of Vocational Education, Faculties of Vocational and Technical Education, Faculties of Music and Fine Arts Education, and Faculties of Technical Education) in Türkiye (CoHE, 2023, p.1).

The "Regulation on Teacher Candidate and Teacher Career Steps" accepted by the MoNE in 2022 and published in the Official Gazette has structured the teaching career in three steps to be valid after the teacher candidacy. These steps are determined as teacher, specialist teacher, and head teacher in the relevant regulation. According to the regulation, the teacher candidacy period is at least one year and a maximum of two years. During this process, teacher candidates are subjected to a Training Program consisting of educational and practical tasks. The program provides teacher candidates with information about the management and operations of their institution under the supervision of the school principals. Under the supervision of appointed mentor teachers, teacher candidates are expected to complete classroom teaching and in-service training. In addition, it is expected that they participate in observations and practices in educational institutions outside their own institution and other institutions under the coordination of Provincial/District National Education Directorates (Official Gazette, 2022).

# Method

## Research design

This research has been designed with a phenomenological research pattern, which is one of the qualitative research designs. Phenomenology studies focus on phenomena that are perceived but require in-depth knowledge (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the phenomenological design was chosen to deeply examine the problems encountered by novice teachers.

## Research context

Some important factors make this research conducted in Istanbul a significant context to achieve the goals of the study. Istanbul is not only the most populous city in Türkiye but also has a highly cosmopolitan structure. Therefore, Istanbul reflects many factors of Türkiye's socio-cultural and economic structure. Accordingly, the standards of both public and private schools, as well as the profile of parents and students, can significantly diverge from each other in Istanbul. Thus, this situation provides a unique opportunity for novice teachers to gain experience.

## Participants

The participants of the research consist of 21 teachers who work in public and private schools in Istanbul. The participants were selected using the maximum diversity sampling method, considering that it would provide richer data. In order to ensure maximum diversity, participants were included in the study based on their gender, the type of institution they work in, professional experience, the level of education they teach, their teaching subject, and educational background. Table 1 presents the list of participants coded as P1...P21 to ensure anonymity.

*Table 1.* Personal characteristics of novice teachers.

| Code | Gender | Institution type | Experience | Teaching Level | Branch |
|------|--------|------------------|------------|----------------|--------|
| P1 | Female | Public | 2 | High School | English |
| P2 | Female | Public | 4 | High School | Theology |
| P3 | Female | Public | 2 | High School | English |
| P4 | Female | Public | 5 | High School | Math |
| P5 | Female | Private | 3 | Pre-school | Pre-school |
| P6 | Female | Public | 3 | Special Education | Agricultural Technologies |
| P7 | Male | Public | 4 | Special Education | Furniture and Interior Design |
| P8 | Male | Public | 1 | Middle School | Turkish |
| P9 | Male | Public | 3 | Special Education | Special Education |
| P10 | Male | Public | 5 | Middle School | Social Studies |
| P11 | Male | Public | 4 | Middle School | Science |
| P12 | Female | Public | 4 | Middle School | Music |
| P13 | Female | Private | 2 | High School | Music |
| P14 | Female | Private | 1 | Primary School | Music |
| P15 | Female | Private | 2 | Primary School | Classroom |
| P16 | Male | Private | 5 | Primary School | Physical Education |
| P17 | Male | Private | 4 | Primary School | Primary |
| P18 | Female | Public | 3 | Middle School | Technology and Design |
| P19 | Male | Public | 4 | Middle School | Technology and Design |
| P20 | Female | Public | 4 | Primary School | Classroom |
| P21 | Male | Public | 4 | Primary School | Classroom |

When Table 1 is examined, it can be observed that the personal characteristics of the participants have been diversified as much as possible. Accordingly, 10 of the participants are male and 11 are female, with 12 working in public schools and 9 in private schools. The professional experience of the participants ranges from 1 to 5 years, with an average of approximately three years of experience. Finally, one participant works in a preschool, six in primary schools, seven in middle schools, five in high schools, and three in vocational education schools.

## Data collection

The data of the research was obtained through semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researchers. The semi-structured interview form consists of 10 main questions and six follow-up questions prepared in light of relevant literature (e.g., Bekdemir, 2018; Doğan, 2016; Ergünay, 2018; Melekhina & Ivleva, 2020; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Paula & Grinfelde, 2018). In the process of creating the interview form, the opinions of six experts were taken into account, and three main questions and two follow-up questions were revised based on the feedback received. Then, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers. After the pilot interviews, it was decided that all the questions were understandable and did not need any repetition.

The prepared interview form includes questions such as "How do you evaluate the education you received in your undergraduate studies, considering your current experience?", "What difficulties do you face as a new teacher? What are you doing to overcome these difficulties?", "What would you like to say about your orientation period as a new teacher?", "What do school administrators and colleagues mean to you in professional terms as a new teacher?" and "How would you describe the effects of the region you work in on you as a new teacher?".

The face-to-face interviews with participants lasted an average of 45 minutes. During this process, participants were given detailed information about the research topic before each interview, and they were committed to keeping their personal information confidential. After the interviews were conducted, the transcripts of the obtained data were made and sent to the participants for their confirmation.

## Data analysis

The content analysis method was preferred for the analysis of the data obtained within the scope of the research, and NVivo 11 software was used for data analysis. Before both researchers coded the data, the interview transcripts were read once. Then, the collected data was uploaded to NVivo 11. The data were analyzed by both researchers using open and axial coding methods at different times. Initially, free-coding processes were followed in NVivo 11; then, the tree-coding process

was completed. During the coding process, the context of the text and the possible causes and effects of this context was taken into account. At the end of the process, both researchers created a common code, category, and theme list by checking the similarities and differences of the code lists they prepared. A deductive approach was followed during the category and theme-creation process. Additionally, in this process, the appropriateness of categories and themes was confirmed by conducting a deductive analysis. Accordingly, the themes within the scope of the research were determined as (i) the Learning-teaching process, (ii) Education structure and opportunities, (iii) Individual and environmental factors, and (iv) Education stakeholders.

Direct quotations have been occasionally used in presenting the themes in order to better reflect the participants' experiences. During the research process, the reliability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability stages emphasized by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed meticulously. In this context, the research data has been stored for possible requests.

## Researcher's positionality and role

The idea that the problems encountered by newly appointed teachers in government or private schools directly affect the quality of education has been influential in choosing the topic of this research. Additionally, the researchers' past teaching experiences and observations, as well as the situations they encountered during this period, have guided the in-depth investigation of this topic. Furthermore, the researchers' experiences related to the research topic have been used as supportive instruments during the data analysis and interpretation stages.

## Results

In this section of the research, four themes identified based on the data analysis are presented. Each theme is supported, where necessary, with direct participant quotes to strengthen the narrative.

## Theme 1. Learning-teaching process

In this theme, the opinions of novice teachers regarding the teaching and learning process are presented. Table 2 includes the two categories and resulting codes that make up the teaching and learning process theme.

*Table 2.* Challenges experienced by novice teachers in the teaching and learning process.

| | |
|---|---|
| Problems Caused by the Curriculum and Content | Course contents and incompatibility of course hours |
| | The incompatibility of a student ready-made and content and gains in the curriculum |
| | Frequent changes in the content and gains in the curriculum |
| | The curriculum is disconnected from daily life |
| Problems Caused by Planning and Practical Teaching | Inability to prepare enough for the lesson |
| | Inability to dominate the course content |
| | Lack of experience |
| | Inadequacies in using teaching methods and techniques |
| | Inability to connect in practice with theoretical education received |
| | Problems with Classroom Management |

The findings indicate that the teaching and learning process theme consists of two categories, problems arising from the curriculum and content, and problems arising from lesson planning and implementation. Firstly, in the category of problems arising from the curriculum and content, participants highlighted the inconsistency between course content and class hours. In particular, they emphasized that the same curriculum was being taught in different types of high schools at different hours (between 4-10 hours), leading to missing important points while trying to cover the curriculum in less time. Another important issue is the inconsistency between student readiness and the content and achievements in the curriculum. P12 provided a concrete example on this matter, stating the following:

(...) For example, the book includes heavier topics. In the sixth and seventh grades, there is a learning outcome to sing simple polyphonic songs. Although I studied at a fine arts high school, I started singing polyphonic songs in the second semester of my first year of high school. You cannot expect a sixth-grader to do that. None of the students in the class can do it because it requires a special skill…

According to participants' views, frequent changes in the content and learning outcomes of the curriculum have a negative impact on students' learning and teachers' performance. Participant P19 stated, *"For example, the program changed recently, and they changed the program according to their own minds without giving sufficient training to any teacher. A lot of topics we didn't know about emerged. That's why we feel inadequate."* Similarly, P11 expressed, *"The science curriculum changes every year. They add the topics they took in the eighth grade to the fifth grade and the topics they took in the eighth grade to the seventh. This causes confusion. Both students and we are*

*experiencing the difficulty.*" According to the participants, the curriculum's detachment from daily life is another significant problem. Participants generally emphasized that the curriculum for their subjects is heavily focused on theory. As a reflection of this, some participants stated that although they try to connect the topic they teach with daily life through their individual efforts, they sometimes cannot succeed in doing so.

Secondly, in the category of problems arising from lesson planning and implementation, participants stated that they were not adequately prepared for the lesson due to various reasons. However, some participants emphasized feeling inadequate about the content of the lessons or how to convey that content. P15 concretized this situation by saying, *"I realize that I have some deficiencies in the curriculum. Especially in Science or Social Studies, there are some things that could be called tips and tricks, and I'm not very familiar with them. I struggle to explain something to children that I am not familiar with.*" On the other hand, participants pointed out that the lack of experience had various reflections on many different topics. Some participants especially stated that they understood the importance better after discovering new situations or solving problems. P12 explained this situation with the sentence, *"As we gain experience, it's different. An activity that we do with one child doesn't work with another child. So, when necessary, we can gain them with different activities.*"

The participants have stated that they could not connect the theoretical education they received during their undergraduate or teaching certificate programs with practice, and that this situation caused difficulties in their profession. P21 expressed their views on this topic by stating, *"I couldn't see the practical application of most of what I learned because either the conditions weren't suitable to try or I couldn't use them. I don't remember most of the methods I learned now.*" Similarly, regarding the inadequacy in using teaching methods and techniques, the participants stated that they were more motivated to apply new methods and techniques when they first started their profession, but they lost this motivation later on. Some participants have attributed this to losing control of the classroom for various reasons (e.g., overcrowding, lack of experience) while applying different methods and techniques. More generally, the participants emphasized the difficulties they experienced in achieving lesson mastery and attracting students' attention. P14 expressed this challenging situation they faced with the following words:

Organizing and getting their attention is very difficult. They talk too much and definitely influence each other a lot. This causes problems with classroom management. I usually have to warn them because they talk too much. Because I have to constantly warn them, we waste time.

## Theme 2. Education structure and facilities

In this theme covers the problems caused by the education policies and practices of inexperienced teachers as well as the physical infrastructure and facilities of the school. The teacher's views regarding the sub-themes that constitute the education structure and facilities theme are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3.* Problems of novice teachers' educational structure and opportunities.

| | |
|---|---|
| Problems Caused by Educational Policies and Practices at School | Orientation deficiency |
| | Some courses are being pushed to the behind |
| | Excessive paperwork burden |
| | Lack of knowledge in document preparation |
| | Lack of suitable environment and encouragement for professional development |
| | Inadequate salaries |
| Problems Caused by the School's Physical Infrastructure and Facilities | Inadequate physical infrastructure and teaching materials of the school |
| | Difficulty in accessing the school |
| | Budget insufficiency |
| | Excessive class sizes |
| | Inadequate guidance services |

The findings indicate that the theme of education structure and facilities consists of two categories: problems arising from education policies and practices in schools and problems arising from the physical infrastructure and facilities of the school. Firstly, under the category of problems arising from education policies and practices, the participants reported feeling a lack of orientation. Additionally, from the participant's views, it is understood that teachers are required to start teaching immediately upon starting their job without any prior orientation process. Participant P18 summarized a similar experience as follows:

> When I first arrived at the school and sat down, they told me to find a place to live. Then they immediately told me to start teaching. Later on, they questioned me in a judgmental manner about why I was assigned to this school with such a low score, and how many points I received. I did not receive any orientation during the process and started teaching immediately.

Participants have pointed out that some courses are not given enough value by the school administration, students, and parents, either because they do not have exams such as level advancement exams or because they are elective courses. P19's statement that "children sometimes underestimate or not give importance to the course, saying that it doesn't come out in exams anyway, or facing problems such as insufficient support from the school administration" supports this argument. Regarding the excess paperwork, participants have emphasized that there is generally a heavy paperwork burden in the school, and they spend a lot of time completing these documents. Some participants have argued that the paperwork burden should be on the school administration and administrative staff. In addition, some participants have stated that they face various difficulties because they do not have enough knowledge and experience about the documents they are required to prepare or submit as standard. On the other hand, participants generally consider the lack of a suitable environment and encouragement for professional development as a significant problem. P2 expressed that teachers' good work should be rewarded by the school administration, even verbally. As a different emphasis, participants have expressed that they do not think they receive a good salary for the effort they put in, and they expect an improvement in this regard.

Secondly, in the category of problems arising from the physical infrastructure and facilities of the school, participants have argued that the inadequacy of the school's physical infrastructure and teaching materials limits them significantly. Participants have shown transportation to the school as one of the difficulties they face at different points. P8 evaluated this situation with the sentence, "The school is located in a forested area. It is a place that can only be reached by vehicle. I cannot come here without a private vehicle." On the other hand, some participants stated that they could not carry out some activities they wanted to do due to budget shortages at the school. P1 emphasized that this situation has a negative effect on gaining students and meeting the expectations of parents. Participants point out the inadequacy of the guidance service at the school, believing that it should play a more active role, especially in dealing with problems with students or preventing various issues. According to participants' views, another problem is the excess number of students in the classrooms. P10 expressed their difficulty in teaching in overcrowded classes with the following sentences:

> (…) The class size is affecting the lesson significantly. Being able to control 20 students is not the same as being able to control 40 students. When the class size is 42, you can only manage to focus on 12 students at most; you cannot fully attend to all of them. There is not enough time or energy for this. Also, the children cannot participate in the lesson as much as they would like to because of time constraints.

## Theme 3. Individual and environmental factors

In this theme, the problems of novice teachers arising from individual characteristics and those arising from socioeconomic and environmental factors are addressed. The opinions of teachers regarding these sub-themes, which constitute the individual and environmental factors theme, are presented in Table 4.

*Table 4.* Problems of novice teachers related to individual and environmental factors.

|  |  |
|---|---|
| Problems Caused by Individual Factors | Inability to adapt to the profession |
|  | Negative attitude towards the profession |
|  | Health problems |
|  | Fear of failure |
| Problems Caused by Environmental Factors | Inability to adapt to the environment |
|  | Access to basic living necessities (water, electricity, shelter, etc.) |

The findings indicate that the theme of individual and environmental factors consists of two categories of problems arising from individual factors and problems arising from socio-economic and environmental factors. Firstly, in the category of problems arising from individual factors, participants stated that their ideals of teaching did not match the current teaching routines. P18 emphasized feeling quite passive as a teacher in the current situation, thus experiencing a conflict between ideals and reality. On the contrary, some participants emphasized their negative attitudes towards the profession, stating that this was also an important problem for them. Regarding this issue, P4 expressed their attitude towards the profession, saying, *"Teaching was the last profession I wanted. I wanted to pursue professions such as engineering or architecture, but my parents said teaching was the most suitable profession for a woman, so I chose to teach."* On the other hand, participants also stated that the fear of failure, especially for novice teachers, was an important factor. P20 drew attention to a different point, arguing that if there is a failure, generally only the teacher is held responsible, which increases the fear and anxiety of novice teachers.

Second, in the category of problems caused by environmental factors, participants indicated that they could face difficulties in adapting to social life, culture, climate, etc., and differences in the regions where they work due to socioeconomic and environmental factors. In this regard, P3 expressed that women were pushed to the background in the region where she previously worked, and men were more prominent. Similarly, P4 emphasized that she could not establish a sense of belonging with the place she lived in due to the lack of social and cultural activities in her previous duty station. On the other hand, another point emphasized by participants was the difficulty of accessing

basic living needs in some regions. Participants expressed that they struggled to find housing in the region where they worked and frequently encountered situations such as power and water cuts. P9 shared his experience on this issue with the following words:

When I first started my duty, I really thought I couldn't stay here. Because there is a certain standard of living that you get used to, and the scene I encountered was far from it. I had to rent a house even though it didn't feel right. There was no natural gas. Electricity and water often went out. After a while, you get used to it, but when you look back, you realize that it wasn't easy at all.

## Theme 4. Education stakeholders

In this theme, the problems of novice teachers related to students, school administrators and colleagues, and parents are discussed. Teacher views on these sub-themes that make up the education stakeholders theme are presented in Table 5.

*Table 5.* Problems of novice teachers regarding education stakeholders.

| | |
|---|---|
| Problems Caused by School Administrators and Colleagues | Lack of advisor and colleague support |
| | Unable to get admin support |
| Problems Caused by Students | Inadequacies in students' readiness |
| | Adoption and behavior problems in students |
| | Problems arising from individual differences of students |
| | Students' indifference towards school and lessons |
| | Student attendance problem |
| Problems Caused by Parents | Problems in parent communication |
| | Parent indifference and unconsciousness |
| | Differences in socio-economic levels of parents |
| | Parents' sexist approaches |

The findings indicate that the education stakeholders theme consists of three categories: problems arising from school administrators and colleagues, problems arising from students, and problems arising from parents. Firstly, participants reported that they did not receive the necessary mentor and peer support they needed during the career entry phase. P19 stated that the teacher assigned to him/her as a mentor had no impact and only filled out the necessary paperwork as a procedure when he/she first started the job. Similarly, participants emphasized that receiving the support of school administrators when starting their job was of critical importance but that it

depended on the personal understanding of the school administrators. P5 expressed her personal experience on this issue as follows:

> In my current institution, there are more team learning processes, so we do everything ourselves, but we do everything together and discuss. But the school principal never thinks of us. When you demand something, he can get out of the business very easily. You don't come across a question like how can I help you.

Secondly, the participants' views in the category of problems arising from students indicate that there are quite different problems experienced. Participants pointed out that students' readiness levels were not sufficient, there were significant differences among students, and this was quite challenging for them. Regarding students' adjustment and behavioral problems, participants focused particularly on students with special needs and immigrant students. Regarding this issue, P2 stated that immigrant students posed a challenge in the classroom due to language problems and social and cultural adaptation. P6, who holds a similar view, expressed her opinion as follows:

> For example, I had a problem with a student today while taking the written exam; he said that he did not know how to write. He can't express himself; he can't take his exams. I can say that we do not get along very well in class. These students are already lagging behind in class and homework. In terms of behavior, they are usually either too hesitant or too spoiled to suppress that sense of oppression. It is hard to find the middle.

On the other hand, the participants have stated that they attempt to provide individual support for inclusive students and students who experience learning difficulties in regard to problems arising from students' individual differences. However, they emphasized that their efforts sometimes exhaust them and that the underperformance of these students reduces their motivation. At a different point, the participants argued that students occasionally display indifferent attitudes towards certain courses or schools in general and that this can be attributed to parenting styles or the absence of any future planning regarding education on the part of the students. Participants identified school attendance as another problem among students. They believe that factors such as seasonal or permanent employment as well as early marriage during school age are influential in causing school attendance problems among students. P12 shared their experiences regarding the region where they served in the past as follows:

> Our school started in October and ended in April, as a significant portion of the students in Urfa worked as seasonal agricultural workers. After April, some of the students did not come to school anymore. Normally, only 15 students would come to school in a class of 20-25 people. Either the father of the girls would not send them to school, or some of them would have been married. These were things that really happened.

Thirdly, in the category of problems arising from parents, communication issues with parents have been emphasized by the participants as an important issue. The

participants stated that the high expectations of parents put pressure on them as newly appointed teachers. P17 provided an example of this situation, stating:

Due to the institution I work for, the parents rather than the students caused me to feel pressure. The administration and other teachers were as helpful as possible. But the expectations of the parents were very high; it was clear that they did not trust me as a new teacher. Until I got my parents to accept me or prove myself, this situation gave me trouble.

Another important point highlighted by the participants is parental neglect and unawareness. Regarding this issue, P2 shared their experiences at their previous workplace, stating, *"At my previous job, there was a profile of parents that we would visit. We would see a parent who did not appreciate or value their child and who was not interested in them."* Later in the conversation, P2 noted that the parental profile at their current workplace was better. As a different observation, the participants reported that parents' socio-economic levels sometimes manifest themselves in the class. P17 noted that students occasionally compare each other based on their possessions, such as the car they arrived in or the things they own, while P15 pointed out a different issue: *"We want to buy a book to solve common questions in class, but not everyone can afford it. When a student's notebook is finished, it takes a lot of time for a new one to arrive, and sometimes parents don't even care about it."* The participants also argued that parents exhibit sexist behavior by not considering female teachers in some regions. P20 clarified this situation, stating, *"In the east, parents do not pay much attention to female teachers. If you are even a female school administrator or a female teacher, they do not consider you. If there is a male school administrator nearby, they will first speak to him."*

## Discussion

In this study, it has been found that novice teachers encounter problems in areas such as the learning-teaching process, educational structure and opportunities, educational stakeholders, and individual and environmental factors. According to the qualitative data obtained, a significant portion of novice teachers experiences problems in the implementation phase of the curriculum in the classroom. Implementing the curriculum requires more than transferring the content; it requires knowledge and skills. While achieving learning objectives, the curriculum also needs to be adapted to student's needs, interests, and abilities. It can be argued that novice teachers do not have enough experience or expertise to do this effectively, resulting in problems in implementing the program in the classroom. Indeed, in a study examining the problems encountered in implementing education programs in Türkiye, it is pointed out that the biggest problem with the program is the insufficient time for teaching the identified contents (Karacaoğlu & Acar, 2010). In the current study, it was found that novice teachers also experience problems when planning and implementing teaching

related to insufficient time, being unprepared for the lesson, and not having a sufficient command of the topic. The most significant problems encountered by new teachers in the profession are related to classroom management and discipline (Onafowora, 2005). In this context, it can be considered an acceptable situation for novice teachers to have relatively low classroom management skills since no new teacher can be expected to be fully prepared on the first days of school (Wayne, Youngs, and Fleischman, 2005). However, novice teachers also believe that the program content is incompatible with the classroom reality and daily life. This situation reveals a two-way theory and practices inconsistency. The first is related to the curriculum, which has been addressed in the program-related issues. The second is that the education received by the teacher during pre-service training is incompatible with the teacher's professional life. Alpaydın et al., (2018) study also found that the competencies gained in teacher training in Türkiye are not in line with the teaching profession in terms of both standards and quality.

According to the findings of this study, novice teachers associate some of their problems with macro-level problems in the education system. Issues related to the organization and resources of education were discussed in relation to the problems experienced in this regard. Novice teachers evaluate their own problems in connection with policy and implementation deficiencies related to the professional development of teachers. In addition, they perceive paperwork, which is a natural consequence of bureaucracy, as a burden while expressing that they are not provided with the necessary guidance and counseling to prepare these documents. It is understood that the orientation expected from administrators and experienced colleagues on this issue is not provided. In addition, the inadequacy of salaries, which can be considered as a macro problem of the education system, emerges as an important issue defined as a problem by novice teachers. According to Demir and Ercan (2013), one of the most important problems that teachers are concerned about is their low income. According to the findings of this study, the vast majority of teachers in the career entry stage find the salaries or wages they receive for their duties insufficient and think that they need to be improved. Darling-Hammond (2003) sees the salary issue as one of the fundamental factors that lead newly appointed teachers to develop positive feelings and thoughts towards their profession. Ryan (1986) has stated that novice teachers generally have difficulty finding appropriate materials for their lessons. In addition to this situation, which is consistent with the findings of the current study, it is observed that novice teachers define problems related to the physical infrastructure and resources of the school, such as inadequate school budgets, crowded classes, transportation difficulties, and the absence of guidance services.

According to the studies of Fantilli and McDougall (2009), novice teachers express feelings of failure, stress, experience-specific challenges in the classroom, and a sense of educational deficiency. It is predictable that these feelings will have an impact on the attitudes developed by the teacher toward their profession. Therefore, individual factors

such as emotional state and psychological well-being, particularly for novice teachers, are crucial at the start of their careers. In the context of this study, it has been observed that novice teachers face some individual problems that can be attributed to a lack of preparedness for the realities of the educational institution. These problems fall under the category of individual factors and are directly related to health issues and attitudes developed toward the profession. Additionally, fear of failure can also be categorized under this factor. As novice teachers' first experiences are viewed by teachers as a source of anxiety, stress, and even depression (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005), these situations can be evaluated as factors that cause various individual problems for novice teachers. Under the category of environmental factors, it has been revealed that some teachers who work in disadvantaged areas face difficulties in accessing basic needs. This finding is noteworthy, as it suggests that teachers assigned to remote and rural areas may also encounter these types of problems. The results show that in Türkiye, the sociological structure of the area in which a teacher works can sometimes be defined as a problem for novice teachers in terms of adapting to their profession. Korkmaz et al., (2004) stated in their study that adapting to the geographical and social environment is among the difficulties faced by novice teachers.

In the current study, it is observed that teachers in the early stages of their careers expect collaboration, assistance, and support, as well as positive relationships from their colleagues and administrators to solve problems related to their profession. However, it is understood that novice teachers do not receive enough support from their mentors or colleagues. Bakioğlu and İnandı (2001) also express in their research that administrators do not make sufficient efforts in the career development of teachers. Richter et al., (2013) state that mentorship would have positive effects during the entry process into the teaching profession. Considering that collaboration with experienced colleagues and mentorship relationships have a significant impact on the development of novice teachers, the emphasis made by Fantilli and McDougall (2009) on this issue is highly meaningful for solving problems. This is because novice teachers need significant support, understanding, encouragement, trust, and guidance during the entry stage of their careers (Katz, 1972). Finally, it is observed that the problems categorized as a student and parent-related in the current study are similar to the problems identified in the relevant literature. In the current study, novice teachers point out that the students' readiness levels are not sufficient, there are significant differences among the students, and this makes their job challenging. Some teachers complain about parents having high expectations, while others complain about parents being indifferent or ignorant. Meister and Melnick (2003) reached similar results in their study on novice teachers throughout the United States. It was revealed that teachers have three main concerns, namely managing students' behavior and various needs, coping with a heavy workload in limited time, and conflicts with parents. Britt's (1997) study found that teachers' perceptions of their initial experiences in the profession were not positive. The study indicates that novice teachers are disappointed in students and evaluate the profession as overwhelming due to behavioral problems they

encounter. In addition, it is reported that novice teachers are unable to communicate effectively with parents and complain about their lack of interest. Ryan (1986) states in his study that parents are a major source of discomfort for new teachers due for various reasons. Meister and Melnick (2003) also stated that novice teachers feel lacking communication skills when communicating with parents and other adults. The findings of this research also overlap with the results of the study by Korkmaz et al., (2004), which identified adaptation to the environment and communicating with parents as among the difficulties encountered by novice teachers.

## Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

The results of the study indicate that novice teachers in Türkiye experience problems such as disappointment and concerns about failure, mainly due to factors such as a lack of connection to university or pedagogical training, inadequacy in classroom management and discipline, inexperience, and encountering an environment with different characteristics than their ideal student, school, and parent profile. These findings are largely consistent with the results of similar studies conducted in different countries. The results suggest that novice teachers face various challenges that can hinder their success in the classroom and career paths. The difficulties encountered at the beginning of a teaching career are considered multifaceted, and it is evaluated that they can be solved through the action of all education stakeholders.

This research provides data-based justifications for a comprehensive review of teacher training programs in Türkiye in light of the difficulties experienced by novice teachers and for the establishment of mentorship programs that teachers can benefit from. In order to eliminate the various problems faced by novice teachers in Türkiye, the study recommends that the education given in teacher training programs should contain more components that are oriented towards practice and application. Universities should have their own practice schools to increase the opportunities for practical training, and the existing practice school process should be enhanced and operated more effectively. The quality of the outputs of teacher training programs can be improved by conducting practices considering the possible scenarios in educational environments during pre-service education and by diversifying the opportunities for practice. Mechanisms necessary for new teachers to collaborate more efficiently with their colleagues should be implemented, and the establishment of formal or informal, long-term interaction-based relationships such as mentoring should be encouraged. Finally, academic research and supportive policies (e.g., projects, practice workshops, workshops) focusing on how teachers cope with the problems they encounter and strategies that can be implemented in this regard can be developed by higher education institutions.

There are some limitations to be considered in this research. First of all, although the researchers have taken into account data saturation during the data collection stage, all participants are teachers currently working in Istanbul. Although this situation may not explain the problems encountered by novice teachers working in different regions of Türkiye, a significant portion of the participants have previously worked in different regions of Türkiye. Thirdly, although various measures were taken to increase the reliability of the research (e.g., maximum variation sampling, detailed reporting of the research process), qualitative findings have limitations in terms of generalizability.

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# Lesson Study: Does It Work for Personal Development of Pre-service ELT Teachers?[1]

## Estudio de clase: ¿Funciona para el desarrollo personal de los profesores de ELT en formación?

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## Abstract

This study is intended to document Lesson Study experience of six preservice English language teachers studying at a state university in Turkey and investigates its impact on their personal development as prospective language teachers. The large volume of data collected through unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, learning journals, classroom observation records and a focus group interview during a seven-month period was subjected to thematic and categorical analysis using qualitative analysis software. The results revealed that Lesson Study intervention contributed to the personal development of the participating pre-service teachers significantly in a variety of aspects, especially in making critical teaching judgements and ensuring adaptable teaching in the classroom. The results further indicated that Lesson Study also led to the development in creative teaching, establishment of rapport with students, self-awareness, and self-confidence of the participants.

**Keywords:** Lesson study, personal development, teacher judgment, self-awareness, self-confidence

## Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo documentar la experiencia de estudio de clase de seis futuros profesores de inglés que estudian en una universidad estatal en Turquía e investiga su impacto en su desarrollo personal como futuros profesores de idiomas. El gran volumen de datos recopilados a través de entrevistas no estructuradas, entrevistas semiestructuradas, diarios de aprendizaje, registros de observación en el aula y una entrevista de grupo focal durante un período de siete meses se sometió a un análisis temático y categórico utilizando un software de análisis cualitativo. Los resultados revelaron que la intervención del Estudio de Lecciones contribuyó significativamente al desarrollo personal de los futuros docentes participantes en una variedad de aspectos, especialmente a la hora de emitir juicios de enseñanza críticos y garantizar una enseñanza adaptable en el aula. Los resultados indicaron además que el estudio de lecciones también condujo al desarrollo de la enseñanza creativa, al establecimiento de una buena relación con los estudiantes, a la autoconciencia y a la confianza en sí mismos de los participantes.

**Palabras clave:** Estudio de clase, desarrollo personal, juicio del profesor, autoconciencia, confianza en uno mismo.

# Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo documentar a experiência do Estudo de Lição de seis professores em formação de língua inglesa estudando em uma universidade estadual na Turquia e investigar seu impacto em seu desenvolvimento pessoal como futuros professores de línguas. O grande volume de dados coletados por meio de entrevistas não estruturadas, entrevistas semiestruturadas, diários de aprendizagem, registros de observação em sala de aula e uma entrevista em grupo durante um período de sete meses foi submetido a análise temática e categorial usando software de análise qualitativa. Os resultados revelaram que a intervenção do Estudo de Lição contribuiu significativamente para o desenvolvimento pessoal dos professores em formação participantes em vários aspectos, especialmente na formulação de julgamentos críticos de ensino e garantindo um ensino adaptável na sala de aula. Os resultados também indicaram que o Estudo de Lição também levou ao desenvolvimento no ensino criativo, estabelecimento de rapport com os alunos, autoconsciência e autoconfiança dos participantes.

*Palavras-chave:* Estudo de Lição, desenvolvimento pessoal, julgamento do professor, autoconsciência, autoconfiança.

The dynamic and complex nature of teaching and the question of what teachers need to know and what kind of capabilities they need to develop for effective teaching have placed important challenges for teacher education. In an ongoing debate on whether the emphasis in teacher education programs should be on cognitive or social and personal aspects of human development, the process of developing necessary knowledge base and skills seems to be recognized and worked on more than the others. In fact, in the literature, the personal element in teaching is used inextricably with professional development acknowledging the complementary association between the two. However, an exclusive focus on personal dispositions for being a good teacher is largely absent. There is a need for a heightened awareness of personal dimension in teacher development, i.e., personal growth in terms of self-esteem, creativity, and empathy.

This study argues that Lesson study, originally designed as a collaborative model of professional development, provides prospective teachers with the opportunity to develop personal strengths and characteristics which would raise their consciousness about teaching practice. The findings of the study are expected to lead a wider discussion on the role of personal growth in teacher education.

## Literature Review

### Personal Development of Teachers

Douglas (2019) pointed out that in most teacher education programs around the world the focus is on the technical aspect of teaching while the reference to the personal growth is neglected or omitted which has been considered as the major reason behind teacher attrition among beginning teachers as this lack of opportunity for personal growth is thought to decrease motivation and commitment towards profession. Today we still see a wide array of research investigating professional development of teachers, while the research leaning on personal development exclusively is limited in number although being a teacher means a personal being and a professional becoming as suggested by Malm (2009).

Of the limited number of studies, Mikulec (2018) examined the personal development of 34 pre-service teachers majoring at Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Level, Secondary and Special Education who participated in a study abroad program in England which included theoretical and practical trainings. The results of the longitudinal study revealed that the participants demonstrated significant personal growth regarding increase in self-confidence and tolerance for ambiguity, self-awareness, flexibility and adaptability and interpersonal skills. Medwell and Wray (2014) in their study aimed to analyze the effect of collaborative classroom research on the reflection and enquiry skills of eight pre-service teachers and observe its impact

on the professional and personal development. Medwell and Wray (2014), based on the findings, reported that the participants emphasized different aspects of personal development including growth of feelings of self-efficacy particularly in making decisions, gaining new insights into working with others and a better understanding of many issues concerning outcomes for learners.

Tang & Choi (2004) examined the cross-cultural experiences of four student teachers who participated in a one-    year post graduate diploma in primary education in different parts of the world and presented their self-reported experiences. They reported that the participants experienced significant personal gains in terms of greater will power, heightened efficacy, increased confidence and stronger sense of self working in collaboration with other people.

It is clear that personal development is more related with the affective aspect of    professional development that is largely overlooked by initial teacher training programs. In this respect, personal development of teachers has been underestimated in teacher education programs and largely ignored among scholars, therefore    further attention has to be paid to the personal process involved in becoming a professional teacher (Malm, 2009).

Within this perspective, the present study intends to explore if Lesson Study intervention makes a difference in the personal development of participating preservice ELT teachers and discusses the possibility of implementing Lesson Study in initial teacher training programs.

## Lesson Study

Lesson Study is a collaborative professional development model originated in Japan. It has recently attracted attention all over the world and has begun to be practiced as an intervention tool for the development of both pre-service and in-service teachers for the purpose of stimulating changes in teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. LS consists of a number of phases of planning, conducting, observing and reflecting on a specifically designed research lesson (Lewis, Perry, & Hurd 2009; Takahashi & McDougal, 2016).

In LS, live research lessons focus on students' learning outcomes that are designed collaboratively by a group of teachers. A group member conducts the research lesson while the other group members document their observations, that are informed by student learning. The group comes together in a debriefing session immediately after the conducted research lesson for the purpose of discussing its impact on students' learning. The cycle is repeated until the overarching goal that shapes the structure of the research lessons is established. The following diagram displays a typical LS cycle.

*Diagram 1.* Lesson Study Cycle
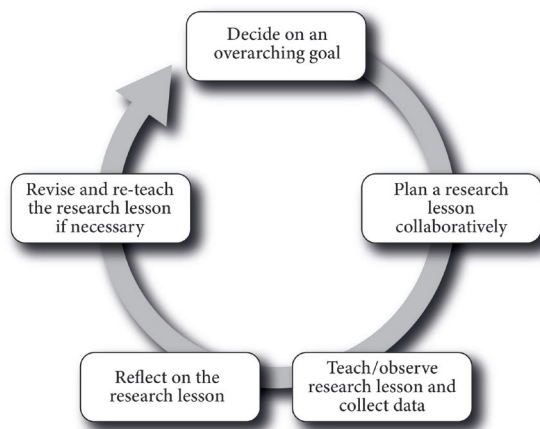


Source: Adapted from conceptual overview of Lesson Study by Murata, 2011, p.2)

Thanks to this collaborative nature, field-based origin, student learning basis and research-oriented focus, LS reflects the features of contemporary professional development models. It is an inquiry-oriented approach to teaching (Warwick et al. 2016) and learning (Lewis & Perry, 2017). It has been used and adapted widely in almost all subject areas. (Robinson & Fernandez, 2006; Lewis, Perry, & Hurd 2009; Cerbin, 2011; Norwich & Ylonen 2015; Cajkler & Wood, 2016).

Robinson and Fernandez (2006), for example, integrated LS into an initial teacher training program through micro teaching practices and investigated the impact on 74 prospective teachers for fifteen weeks. The results of the study revealed that LS is a powerful tool in terms of bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher training programs as well as promoting collaboration among teacher candidates and critical reflection.

Murata and Pothen (2011) also investigated the impact of LS on pre-service elementary mathematics courses students during a ten-week research process and reported significant positive results, similar to the previous research, suggesting that LS supported connection making and sense making process between theory and practice, participants gained variety of pedagogical skills focusing their attention on student learning and LS established ground for meaningful collaboration. More recently, Leavy and Hourigan (2016) incorporated LS into pre-service teacher education following a strict formal approach and observed year 3 and year 4 students at a university for a 10-week semester period. They reported that LS intervention contributed significantly to the participating prospective teachers' pedagogic content knowledge.

Of the limited studies on LS from personal development perspective, Chassels and Melville (2009), reported that participating in lesson study can reduce student teachers' sense of isolation as new teachers and introduce them to norms of working as part of a teacher community. Within this perspective, this study aims to explore the impact of the Japanese Lesson Study professional development model on Turkish pre-service English language teachers' personal development and the possibility of implementing LS into pre-service language teacher education in Turkey. Therefore, the following research question and sub research question guided the inquiry for the present study.

**RQ 1.** How does the Lesson Study professional development model affect participants' personal development?

**RQ 1 a.** How does each participant perceive the contribution of the Lesson Study process to their personal development?

# Methodology

## Research design

Since the study intended to investigate LS in its natural context and present detailed interpretation using a variety of data sources, qualitative research design was applied as the methodological foundation of the research. As a form of qualitative research, case study design was chosen because the subject of inquiry, LS, in the present study was observed in detail through multiple case research lesson applications in order to observe multiple interacting variables at work (Yin, 2014) in leading to personal development which was of research focus.

## Research participants

Six pre-service ELT teachers, who were in their senior years, participated in the study. They were selected on a voluntary basis among the ones who were considered to be a representative sample of the target population. Their ages ranged from 22 to 27.

The researcher himself also had three distinctive roles. First, he provided the necessary training on the theory and implementation of LS which lasted for 5 weeks. Second, he assumed the role of a counselor by participating in lesson planning meetings and post lesson discussions and helping the preservice teachers when needed. It is important to note that the researcher did not intervene directly or indirectly to change the flow of process by floating ideas during lesson planning meetings and post lesson discussions. The third role of the researcher was related to his conventional researcher duties as organizing research lesson team, observing interaction during meetings, investigating research lessons, recording observations, and collecting relevant data.

The last participant in the research was an outside observer who played a significant role by providing different standpoints for the LS team and thus enhanced their experience significantly. He was present during the whole research process and contributed significantly with his reflections, opinions, and thoughts. What makes his role different from the researcher is that he acted as counselor     for the participants to ensure different perspectives and was not responsible for coordinating activities and collecting evidence.

## Lesson Study Process

Originally, the whole study process consisted of two stages: theoretical and practical. The former was planned to introduce LS intervention and inform the participants about the philosophy behind. The latter aimed to put the theoretical information provided by the training     into action with ongoing cycles of research lessons which consisted of one pilot study and four following research lessons. The following diagram summarizes the steps taken during the whole research process.



```
                    Lesson Study Process
           ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
    Theoretical Stage                       Practical Stage
         ├── Training 1                           ├── Pilot Study
         ├── Training 2                           ├── Focus Group Interview
         ├── Training 3                           ├── Research Lesson 1
         └── Training 4                           ├── Research Lesson 2
                                                  ├── Research Lesson 3
                                                  ├── Research Lesson 4
                                                  └── Focus Group Interview
```
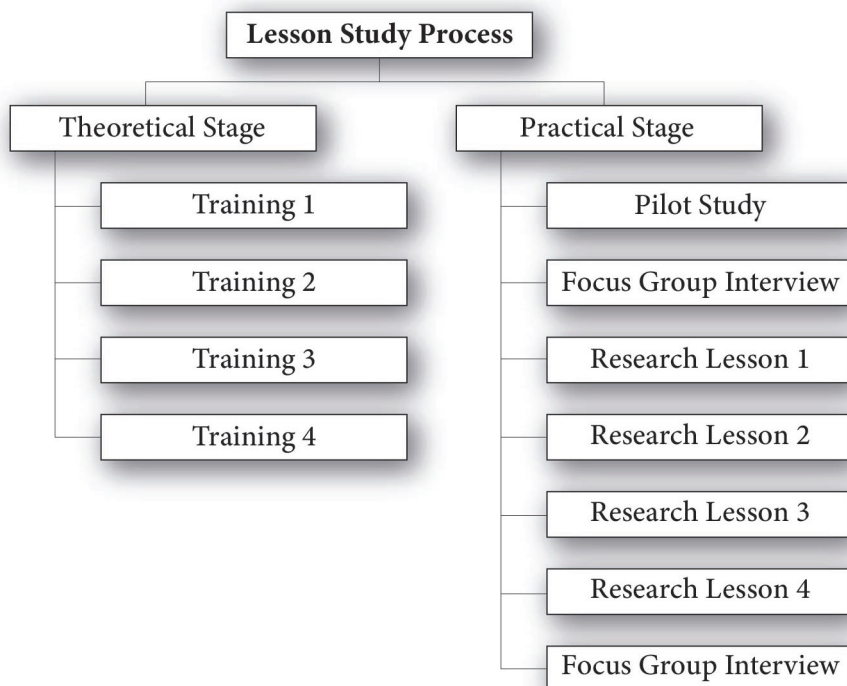
*Diagram 2.* Lesson Study Process

The study was planned to be implemented in one academic year. The theoretical stage lasted five weeks which included the training on finding a focus for the research lessons, designing, planning, analyzing and revising research lessons. When the theoretical phase was over, the participants decided on an overarching goal which was providing highest student participation to the activities and planned a research lesson for the pilot study that was consistent with it. The participants were provided with necessary documents prepared by Barbrina, Chokshi, and Fernandez (2012), which included group goal selection document, lesson study protocol and lesson plan template. After an intensive discussion over the target group, the LS team decided to apply the pilot study with 7thGrade students to test the applicability of the LS in Turkish educational context. The results were quite promising and led to a number of changes in the structure. The cycle continued for four more research lessons with a number of changes in research lesson plan content in each cycle until LS team decided in fourth research lesson that overarching goal was attained and core lesson objectives were obtained.

## Data Collection

As the present study aimed to investigate Lesson Study that is a comprehensive phenomenon, large volume of data was collected from variety of sources through multiple cases. These sources are semi-structured interviews that included transcriptions of lesson planning meetings and post lesson discussions of each research lesson, classroom observations recorded by the participants, reflective journals written by each preservice teacher after each research lesson cycle and focus group interviews conducted after pilot study and end of the research. In this respect, the collected data was triangulated from multiple data sources for the purpose of broader understanding of research phenomenon.

## Data Analysis

As the study provided large scale of qualitative data collected through variety of data collection tools, Atlas.Ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software was used for the inductive thematic analysis within grounded theory framework as it enables structuring large volume of data, analyzing it systematically and representing the results with diagrams and relations with other data types. The raw data was analyzed deeply and coded through open coding procedure in the descriptive stage. Later on, the coded data was organized themes and categories through constant comparative method until reaching a theoretical model (Glaser, Strauss, 1967).

The internal validity was enabled by presenting each step of LS in detail and ensured by the systematic analysis of the collected data with the use of qualitative data software.

Also, the collected data was triangulated for the comprehensive understanding of the research query. For the purpose of increasing content validity, expert opinion was collected for each data collection instrument. The constructs and questions forwarded to the participants in semi-structured interviews, reflective journals and focus group interviews were analyzed by a subject specialist in terms of wording and content and necessary modifications were made on the constructs on the basis of the feedback provided.

For the reliability intercoder agreement was employed. The coding of the researcher and another subject specialist were compared using SPSS 23 with Cohen's Kappa Statistics. The data sets consisted of one pilot study, four research lessons and post application reflections were subjected to Cohen's Kappa separately and interpreted on the basis of the strength of agreement. A substantial degree of consensus was attained between the raters' coding on the basis of Landis and Koch's (1977) reference list. In order to increase reliability, the data sets and relevant codes were reviewed again, and it was seen that most disagreements originated from the differences in the interpretation of two code labels that were named as "teacher adaptability" and "teacher judgement". Therefore, relevant quotations were reanalyzed and by the raters until consensus was established by making necessary changes. The code book for personal development theme was shaped as in the following table after intercoder reliability analysis.

*Table 1.* Reorganization of the Codebook for the "Personal Development" Theme

| Theme | Codes |
|---|---|
| Personal Development | self-awareness |
| | self-confidence |
| | teacher adaptability |
| | teacher creativity |
| | teacher judgement |
| | teacher rapport |

## Results

**The Impact of Lesson Study on the Personal Development of Pre-service Teachers**

The following network view displays the graphical representation of codes subsumed by personal development theme together with groundedness representing code frequency and density which refers to number of links to other codes.

*Figure 1.* Network view of personal development theme
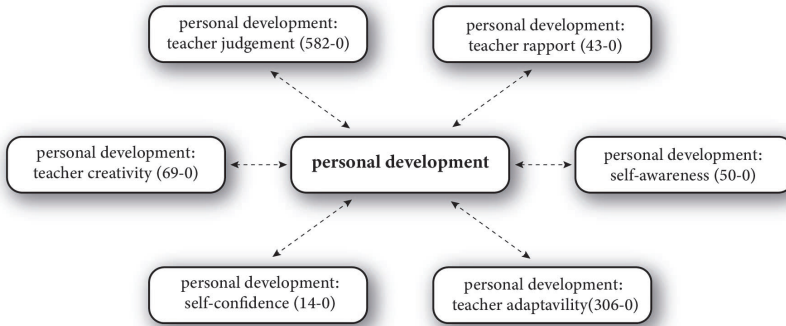


The figure represents that personal development is consisted of six codes as mentioned before and each code label has different groundedness level which shows the application frequency of each code. On the basis of the groundedness, it is crystally clear that the most grounded code in the present study is "teacher judgement" as it occurred in 582 occasions. The second most grounded code label is "teacher adaptability" since it was associated with 306 quotations. The groundedness of the following codes declines significantly as presented in the figure given above. On the basis of the groundendness level, "teacher creativity" ranked third as it was referenced in 69 instances. "Self-awareness" code was applied in 50 occasions and ranked fourth. The following code is "teacher rapport" and it was linked to 43 data segments. The least grounded code is "self-confidence" because of the limited number of associations with the data that is 14. The figure further presents the density of each code is 0 which implies that the codes did not co-occur with each other in any quotations.

*Table 2.* The Impact on the Personal Development

|  | Codes | judgement | adaptability | creativity | self-awareness | rapport | self-confidence | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pilot | N | 136 | 44 | 42 | 9 | 15 | 1 | 247 |
|  | % | 23,3 | 14,3 | 60,8 | 18 | 34,8 | 7,1 | 23,2 |
| RL1 | N | 129 | 107 | 18 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 276 |
|  | % | 22,1 | 34,9 | 26 | 16 | 23,2 | 28,5 | 25,9 |
| RL2 | N | 110 | 85 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 202 |
|  | % | 18,9 | 27,7 | 5,7 | 0 | 6,9 | 0 | 18,9 |
| RL3 | N | 157 | 60 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 226 |
|  | % | 26,9 | 19,6 | 5,7 | 0 | 9,3 | 7,1 | 21,2 |
| RL4 | N | 47 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 63 |
|  | % | 8 | 2,2 | 0 | 4 | 9,3 | 21,4 | 5,9 |
| Post | N | 3 | 3 | 1 | 31 | 7 | 5 | 50 |
|  | % | 0,5 | 0,9 | 1,4 | 62 | 16,2 | 35,7 | 4,6 |
|  | N | 582 | 306 | 69 | 50 | 43 | 14 | 1064 |
|  | % | 54,6 | 28,7 | 6,4 | 4,6 | 4 | 1,3 | 100 |

The table given above clearly illustrates that "teacher judgement" is the most frequently associated code label        with the quotations within all data sets when compared with the others. More than half of the relevant data segments (54,6 %) were linked to "teacher judgement" code and the number of selected quotations is 582 as represented by the table. When the table is analyzed on the basis of the data sources, it is not possible to talk about consistent distribution. In other words, the frequency does not increase or decrease steadily.

The second code on the basis of groundedness is "teacher adaptability" as represented by the table. A total of 306 data segments were linked to the relevant code and the number corresponds to 28,7 % of the total code quotation association within personal development theme. As in the previous code label, a consistent frequency distribution does not exist among data sources. The highest number of associations between "teacher adaptability" code and the relevant data segments were observed in research lesson 1. A total of 107 quotations were associated with the given code which is equal to 38, 7 % of the total associations with "teacher adaptability" code.

The frequency of the following codes declines sharply as given in the table. The code that is ranked third on the basis of frequency count is "teacher creativity". The number of associations with the given code is 69 which corresponds of 6,4 % of the total code quotations associations that is 1064. The table clearly displays that the code was most frequently linked to the data segments in the pilot study with 42 occurrences. As in

the previous codes, a consistent distribution was not observed across data sources as the table presented.

The frequency table further presented that the codes that are ranked fourth and fifth in terms of groundedness are "self-awareness" and "teacher rapport" respectively. A total of 50 quotations were linked to "self-awareness" code which is equal to 4,6 % of the total number of code-quotation association within personal development theme. Similarly, 43 data segments were associated with "teacher rapport" code label which corresponds to 4 % of the total. In a similar vein, a consistent distribution across data sources was not observed for both code labels.

The code with the lowest groundedness within personal development theme is "self-confidence" as given in Table 2. Only 14 occurrences existed for the given code which is equal to 1,4 % of the total code-quotation association. With respect to frequency distribution across data sources the table displays that the code was most frequently referenced in post application documents.

Briefly, it could be stated that the code that has the highest groundedness is "teacher judgement" since more than half of the associations within personal development theme is referenced with the given code. On the other end, the code label "self-confidence" stands with the lowest frequency count. It was also observed that a consistent distribution was not observed across data sources for each code label.

## The Impact of Lesson Study on Each Participant's Personal Development

The following code co-occurrence table representing the cross tabulation of codes which includes percentage and coefficient value of each association displays the frequency distribution of each code label and the strength of the relation for each participating preservice ELT teachers.

Table 3. Participants' Personal Development

| Codes | | judgement | adaptability | self-awareness | creativity | rapport | self-confidence | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | N | 72 | 37 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 126 |
| | % | 57 | 29 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| | C | ,08 | ,06 | ,02 | ,01 | ,01 | ,01 | |
| P2 | N | 143 | 100 | 11 | 31 | 14 | 2 | 301 |
| | % | 48 | 33 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 100 |
| | C | ,13 | ,11 | ,02 | ,11 | ,02 | 0 | |
| P3 | N | 60 | 16 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 93 |
| | % | 65 | 17 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 1,4 | 100 |
| | C | ,08 | ,03 | ,03 | ,01 | ,02 | 0 | |
| P4 | N | 88 | 39 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 144 |
| | % | 61 | 27 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 100 |
| | C | ,09 | ,06 | ,01 | ,01 | ,01 | ,01 | |
| P5 | N | 116 | 55 | 7 | 15 | 4 | 3 | 200 |
| | % | 58 | 28 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 100 |
| | C | ,11 | ,07 | ,01 | ,02 | ,01 | ,01 | |
| P6 | N | 102 | 54 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 2 | 193 |
| | % | 53 | 28 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 100 |
| | C | ,11 | ,07 | ,02 | ,02 | ,03 | 0 | |

The table clearly visualizes that a consistent distribution exists for each partner with respect to the strongest impact as "teacher judgement" is the code label that is most relevant to all six participants' data segments referenced with personal development. Nearly half of each participant's quotations that were referenced with the codes within personal development theme were associated with "teacher judgement" code and the co-efficient values given in the table above also indicate that the association is the strongest when compared with others. The following quotation chosen randomly from the participants' data segments as sample for the association between "teacher judgement" code and relevant data.

> It is vitally important to give instructions properly. Even the teacher should act out the instruction while giving it and check whether the students have understood or not. (The participant is commenting on the reason behind why the planned activity was not implemented properly in pilot study RL) (Ext.2: 54).

The following code that's ranked second in terms of impact for all six participants is "teacher adaptability" but the frequency declines at a significant level as given in Table

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3. The table presents nearly one third of each participant's quotations were associated with "teacher adaptability" code label except participant 3. The following quotation is the representative for the association between "teacher adaptability" code and related data segment.

> The activity should be a pair work activity because the classroom size is too big. In that way, we can also avoid chaos and the noise (The participant is reporting that the follow up activity should be adapted to pair work format on the basis of his/her observations in class observation sheet during RL four) (Ext.3: 31).

Concerning the other codes, a significant impact on the participating preservice teachers was not observed as displayed by Table 3. For the first participant, the codes were ordered as "self-awareness", "teacher creativity", "teacher rapport" and "self-confidence" respectively on the basis of frequency count but the number of occurrences for each code label is quite rare.

With respect to second participant findings, it was observed that "teacher creativity" code is ranked third in terms of impact on the basis of frequency distribution of the codes. Although the impact is not as strong as "teacher judgement" and "teacher adaptability" labels, a considerable number of quotations were associated with "teacher creativity" code as presented in Table 3. The number of quotations referenced with the code is 31 which corresponds to % 10 of the total number. The association of "teacher creativity" and the relevant data is exemplified in the following quote.

> We will divide the classroom into groups. We will arrange a carton box for each group. We will cover each box and they are going to be planets. We will distribute papers for each group to make paper airplanes. They will make up sentences using should and shouldn't and throw the planes into the card box. Those who have the most paper planes in the box will save the World and win the game. (The participant is suggesting a creative game for the follow up activity) (Ext 12: 48).

Participant 3's and 4's findings represented similar distribution to the previous partners. The strongest impact was observed in "teacher judgement" code as mentioned before and "teacher adaptability" is ranked second depending on quotation numbers, their percentages to the total and coefficient values provided by the table. The following codes are not significant in terms of impact and were not discussed because of space concerns.

"Teacher creativity" was re-observed at a low level in Participant 5's findings and ranked third in the order of impact as presented by Table 3. A total of 15 quotations was referenced with the code which is equal to % 8 of the total number of quotations associated with the codes within personal development theme. The following extract taken from Participant 5's data sources is representing the association between "teacher creativity" code and relevant data segment.

> I am thinking about something like Sherlock Holmes. He was pulling something with a rope. I don't know why but it came to my mind. I am thinking of connecting it to an activity,

but I don't know if we can use it in the introduction or presentation. (The participant is taking the floor in the pilot study lesson planning meeting and commenting on an activity to include into the lesson plan. (Ext. 19: 155).

The code was followed by "self-awareness", "teacher rapport" and "self-confidence" codes respectively but the impact is not significant as given in the table.

Participant 6's findings presented different distribution in terms of impact as presented in Table 3. Although the impact is not strong, the code that is ranked third on the basis of frequency count is "teacher rapport". The code was applied in 13 occasions according to code co-occurrence table whose percentage to the total is % 7. The following is a sample extract for the association between "teacher rapport" code and relevant data.

I saw that there were some foreign students in the classroom and other students were saying something negatively. It seems as if they don't like them. They didn't engage in the research lesson. Therefore, we have to solve this problem because it is clearly affecting their participation in the classroom. (Ext.4: 101).

The following code ranked fourth with respect to frequency distribution is "teacher creativity" as given in the table. The code appeared in 12 occasions and the percentage of the association is % 6,2 on the basis of total quotation number. The co-efficient value of the association is 0,02 which indicates a weak relationship between the code and the referenced quotations.

I would like to suggest something. We can bring one more box into the classroom and we write "recycling box" on it. When the game is over, the students may throw those papers that they use for the game into the recycling box. That would be consistent with our RL theme (The participant is offering a unique idea to apply into the RL for the following RL) (Ext.15: 42).

The next code that is fifth in the rank order is "self-awareness" and the impact is very low. The code was associated with 10 quotations as displayed by the table and the number corresponds to % 5,1 of the total which is 193. The co-efficient value which is 0,02 is the same as the previous code quotation association. The extract below exemplifies the relation between "self-awareness" code and a selected quotation from Participant 3.

This process has had a great impact on my perceptions about teaching and education and on my professional route in terms of how to plan and teach a course on the basis of students' needs and unexpected situations (Ext.70: 1).

The least grounded code concerning impact for the participants is "self-confidence" except Participant 4. The code was applied on a few occasions for all the participants as displayed in Table 3. In other words, the code has the lowest frequency level in terms of association with the quotations concerning personal development.

# Discussion

This study aimed to investigate if Lesson Study intervention had an impact on the personal development of participating preservice ELT teachers and the findings revealed Lesson Study is a vital professional development model leading to personal growth of prospective teachers which is consistent with the existing literature supporting strong positive impact of Lesson Study on the personal and professional development of both practicing and prospective teachers (Sims & Daniel, 2009; Dudley, 2016; Hart, Alston , & Murata, 2011; Lewis & Hurd, 2011; Lewis, 2009).

The study provides findings concerning personal development of pre-service teachers enabled by Lesson Study intervention. Within this perspective, the study revealed similar findings with Lewis (2009) who noted enhanced teacher learning leading to instructional improvement, knowledge about teaching, interpersonal relationships and personal growth that is triggered by Lesson Study model.

The observation of five research lessons during recycling processes of planning and implementation provided opportunities for the participating six preservice ELT teachers to make a variety of teaching decisions on the basis of their observations which contributed significantly to professional teaching judgement and teaching decision making skills. Smith (as cited in Bruniges, 2007, p. 244) stated that teacher judgement is not a random and ordinary teaching decision as it requires critical, reflective, and attentive process. Within this perspective, Lesson Study provided situated learning opportunities for the participants that employed a variety of pedagogical judgements which deepened their pedagogical repertoire of teaching and helped them make sound judgements about teaching.

The findings further revealed strong impact of Lesson Study process on the adaptability skills of the participating preservice ELT teachers which requires ability to respond efficiently to ever-changing and dynamic classroom conditions. As Corno (2008) and Collie & Martin (2016) suggested adaptability is a significant competency for effective teachers and professional development models should include activities encouraging teachers to employ their adaptability skills in the classroom. It was observed in the present study that Lesson Study provided an ideal ground for the participating preservice ELT teachers that they practiced their adaptability skills constantly because of the nature of Lesson Study process which entailed reshaping lesson plans recurrently and teaching constructively on the basis of observation of student learning during the application of research lessons. Significant changes were recorded in Lesson Study group members' adaptability skills as the process proceeded. The group members were able to respond flexibly and effortlessly to students' needs and changing circumstances in the classroom towards the end of the process. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Lesson Study is an effective tool for contributing to prospective teachers' adaptability skills (Schipper, van der Lans, de Vries, Goei, & van Veen, 2020).

In consistent with Dudley's (2015) statement "creativity is the sine qua non of Lesson Study" (p.19) the intervention fostered participating prospective teachers' creativity at a certain level but the perceived impact was low as presented by the findings. It was observed that ongoing cycles of research lessons consisted of lesson planning meetings and post lesson discussions triggered teacher creativity, as Lesson Study process drove participants to reflect on the obstacles in front of the implementation of the research lessons effectively and find alternatives to solve them for the upcoming one. The process revealed that the participants were able to generate creative and extraordinary ideas for the research lessons during lesson planning meetings and associate them with the classroom activities which led to instructional improvement as observed. In this sense, the study offers similar findings with Murooka's (2007) ideas who suggested that the experimental nature of Lesson Study contributes significantly to teacher creativity.

The results further represented that Lesson Study raised participants' awareness about their strengths and weaknesses, but the perceived impact was not significant as revealed by the findings. Especially, semi-structured interviews and reflective journals involved references to participants' existing ill-formed beliefs about learning and teaching derived from early experiences, biases towards some learner types and emotional ups and downs. Although the observed impact was low, it could be argued that Lesson Study also provides a ground for promoting awareness of self as teachers.

Lesson Study also provided reasons for the prospective teachers to create a positive classroom atmosphere in order to establish strong emotional relationship with the students which could be attributed to student learning-oriented nature of Lesson Study. Although the impact is not strong,      some of the participants reported that Lesson Study intervention helped them to see the planned research lessons through the eyes of the students and feel empathy with them. As a result, they were better able to observe students' learning and engagement in the classroom and raised awareness about students' needs which aligns with the relevant literature (Norwich & Ylonen, 2015; Murata, 2011; Cajkler, Wood, Norton, & Pedder, 2014).

Lastly, despite the limited impact on the basis of very few references, it could be suggested that Lesson Study may foster preservice teachers' self-confidence. Some participants strongly emphasized that Lesson Study reduced their concerns about being a teacher and encouraged them to feel brave and confident before getting into the classroom. In this respect, the study presented consistent findings with the existing literature investigated the effect of Lesson Study on the participating teachers' self-confidence and found correlating association (Villalon, 2016; Corcoran, 2011).

# Conclusion

The findings of this study have significant implications for preservice teachers and initial teacher education programs. First of all, Lesson Study offers variety of valuable on-site opportunity for the prospective teachers who are considered to have variety of problems such as classroom management skills (Wubbels, 2011), deficit based thinking (Scheiner, 2023), dependence on textbooks (Ruswick, 2015), etc. The present study revealed that Lesson Study has a significant potential to remedy these deficits.

Also, the participants benefited substantially from the advantages of working in a collaborative environment in which they plan the research lessons collegially and team-teach them. In this sense, Lesson Study provides a valuable professional learning community in which the prospective teachers benefit from the dialogue and discussions that     expose their implicit beliefs about teaching, reflect on them, question and restructure them if necessary.

Additionally, Lesson Study relies on the idea of teacher learning through inquiry which serves a useful purpose for personal development of prospective teachers who experience     serious emotional breakdowns, tensions and lack of confidence before beginning their     professional journey (Okan, 2002). In this sense, Lesson Study has potential to address student teachers' main survival concerns with its focus on key teaching skills such as teaching judgement, adaptability, creativity and thus promoting self-awareness and self-confidence.

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# The Contribution of Information Gap Activities to Support Honduran Ninth-grade Students' speaking Fluency: Action Research[1]

## La Contribución de las Actividades con Vacío de Información para Apoyar la Fluidez del Habla de los Estudiantes Hondureños de Noveno Grado.

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## Abstract

This article presents the process and results of an action research project which explored the contribution of information gap activities to support a group Honduran ninth-graders' speaking fluency. Their speaking fluency was assessed in terms of speech rate, breakdowns or pauses, and repairs. This study adopted a mixed method approach: quantitative and qualitative. The sample chosen was a purposive sample made up of a group of seven ninth graders who had been learning English in rural context in a public high school in Comayagua for two years, all aged between 14 and 15 years old, with a basic level of English. The information gap technique was implemented during seven sessions following the regular topics scheduled for the school term. Data were collected by applying a pre-test and a post-test to assess students'fluency, and results were assessed with an analytic rubric; and their perceptions were assessed by a focus group. The pre and post-test results showed an improvement in participants' speaking fluency, and these results were in agreement with their positive perceptions. Moreover, participants expressed that information gap activities had impacted positively their motivation and their awareness of mistakes. In conclusion, information gap activities helped learners improve their speaking fluency and might support English teachers in Honduran rural public contexts not to rely upon traditional textbook use and make their classes more motivating and communicative.

**Keywords:** breakdowns, information gap activities, repairs, speaking fluency, speech rate, teaching speaking.

## Resumen

Este artículo corresponde a una investigación-acción que exploró la contribución de las actividades de vacío de información para apoyar la fluidez del habla en un grupo de estudiantes hondureños de noveno grado. La fluidez del habla de los participantes se evaluó en términos de la velocidad, las interrupciones o pausas y reparaciones. Este estudio adoptó un enfoque metodológico mixto: cuantitativo y cualitativo. La muestra elegida fue un muestreo intencional o por juicio, formado por un grupo de siete estudiantes de noveno grado que llevan dos años aprendiendo inglés, todos en edades comprendidas entre los 14 y 15 años, con un nivel de inglés básico. Estos estudiantes provienen de una escuela secundaria pública rural en el municipio de Comayagua, Honduras. La técnica de las actividades con vacío de información se implementó durante siete sesiones abordando los temas regulares programados para el período académico. Los datos fueron recolectados mediante la aplicación de un pre-test y un post-test para evaluar la fluidez, y los resultados fueron evaluados con una rúbrica analítica; y para recoger las percepciones de los participantes se realizó un grupo focal. Los resultados del pre y post-test mostraron una mejora en la fluidez de habla de los estudiantes, y estos resultados mostraron correspondencia con sus percepciones positivas. Además, los participantes manifestaron que estas actividades impactaron positivamente en su motivación y en su toma de conciencia de los errores. En conclusión, las actividades de vacío de información ayudaron a los estudiantes a mejorar su fluidez al hablar, y este hallazgo permite ayudar a los maestros hondureños de inglés en contextos públicos rurales a no depender exclusivamente de los textos de estudio y a diseñar clases más comunicativas y motivadoras.

**Palabras Claves:** pausas, actividades de vacío de información, reparos, fluidez oral, velocidad de discurso, enseñanza del habla.

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa autoetnográfica colaborativa explora a trajetória de construção da identidade de um grupo de três pesquisadores professores de inglês, assim como as repercussões que esses processos tiveram na implementação de uma percepção crítica e decolonial em relação ao campo de ensino de línguas (ELT). Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, os professores de inglês envolvidos nesta autoetnografia colaborativa compartilharam suas experiências, crenças e influências para examinar coletivamente como esses elementos influenciaram suas identidades profissionais em evolução e sua compreensão crítica atual do campo. Em geral, o estudo revela que a autoetnografia colaborativa proporciona uma plataforma única para examinar a trajetória de identidade de indivíduos e estabelecer uma conexão entre o passado e o presente. Os resultados também destacam a interação entre experiências individuais, contextos socioculturais e práticas pedagógicas, promovendo uma compreensão mais profunda do desenvolvimento da identidade de pesquisador-professor de inglês. Ao enfatizar a importância da exploração coletiva, este estudo defende a incorporação mais ativa da autoetnografia colaborativa como uma ferramenta valiosa para o desenvolvimento profissional no ensino de inglês e pesquisa em geral, e na Colômbia em particular.

**Palavras-chave:** falhas, atividades de lacuna de informação, reparos, fluência na fala, taxa de fala, ensino da fala.

# Introduction

The National Curriculum Design for Primary Education in Honduras (2003) has established some competencies that Honduran students are expected to achieve in English language learning at the end of their primary education (ninth grade) and it is stated that students should be able to show confidence and a favorable attitude towards oral communication, use English orally to meet their communication needs, for recreation, solving problems and for knowing themselves. They should be able to produce simple oral dialogic messages related to people and events in the immediate school environment. (Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Educación de Honduras, 2003, pp.61-62).

To achieve these goals, it is suggested the use of the task-based approach in class, which "emphasizes the processes of interaction in the classroom as an element for the collective construction of meaning and the linguistic system". (Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Educación de Honduras, 2003, p.61)

Even though the Secretary of Education of Honduras [SEH] has set clear standards, the reality remains the same: "In many public schools, lack of resources and the indifference of educational authorities have left the teaching of English behind" (Pagoada, 2014, p.2) According to the same author, one of the reasons for this problematic situation is the lack of suitable resources. In Honduras, teachers just have the textbooks to teach English and unfortunately these are not very appropriate as they are strongly grammar-focused and in the lessons there are few opportunities for students to develop speaking activities or to promote their fluency. Students spend most of the time memorizing grammar rules. Therefore, teachers need to look for other resources to achieve the standards expected at the end of each grade.

As a result, English speaking fluency in the classroom is neglected as teachers do not have enough time to develop interactive speaking activities for the learners to use all the vocabulary and grammar they know; that is why this is a crucial language skill that requires improvement.

The teacher-researcher decided to address the criteria of speaking fluency after observing in her classroom that most of the students had problems when speaking in class, they barely said some short sentences, and they were not used to taking part in speaking activities during English classes. The main aim of this action research was to explore how the use of information gap activities in the English lessons could support these ninth graders' speaking fluency. Particularly, the intervention developed had as the main focus to assess participants' fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs, and also to analyze their perceptions about the effectiveness of these activities. Taking into account that there is not much data related to the implementation of new and interactive strategies in the teaching of English in a public rural education context, this action research provides valuable and important insights in this field.

## General Objective

To explore Honduran ninth-grade students' perceptions about their speaking fluency improvement in English through the use of information gap activities.

## Specific Objectives

- To assess the contribution of information gap activities to support students' speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns and repairs.

- To analyze students' perception regarding the use of information gap activities to support their speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns and repairs.

# Literature Review

## Speaking Skill Development

There are different definitions about the speaking skill considering its several characteristics. Richards (2008) states that "speaking refers to the circumstances where the point is on what it is said or done. The message is the central focus alongside the interaction" (p.24). Jondeya (2011, p.15) states that "speaking is a skill of comprehending, pronouncing, and being fluent and accurate in using grammar and vocabulary". According to Nunan (2003) "Speaking is a productive aural/ oral skill, and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning" (p.48). Based on all these definitions, it can be said that speaking is a complex productive skill that includes elements like conveying the message effectively by using vocabulary and grammar to transmit this message. One essential aspect of speaking is the social interaction it generates because when people speak, they are not only producing a set of words, but they are also sharing knowledge and in order to that they need to use many cognitive and social skills. As Putri (2014) remarks, "It is not merely speaking without any organization or ideas. It needs confidence and competence to build a good communication with others" (p.7). Undoubtedly, speaking includes a significant number of aspects that might make it one of the most challenging skills when learning or teaching a language but at the same time one of the most essential.

## The challenge of developing the speaking skill in the EFL classroom

Teaching speaking should be the core of each EFL /ESL course in all educational institutions. Keeping this aim in mind, teachers should focus on developing more communicative activities in their lessons and give students more opportunities to use the language naturally and interactively to achieve a higher level of proficiency. In different contexts, English teachers feel this pressure to help students become fluent or proficient when speaking the language, so they constantly search for innovative teaching methodologies. Well- informed teachers equip students with the language they need to complete the different speaking tasks, hence students can achieve the expected outcomes. Nevertheless, the responsibility not only relies on teachers, students should also take the speaking practice opportunities seriously because speaking in a foreign language is a very difficult task, learners should not only acquire the essential grammatical rules or vocabulary in English, but they should also practice the language through communication in their social environment. (Namaziandost et. al, 2019)

## Developing learners' speaking fluency

The speaking skill has different elements; some authors call them macro skills while other call them micro-skills. Harmer (2007) names them categories. He explains that "there are two speaking categories: accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation; and fluency, considered to be 'the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously" (p.112). For the purpose of this study, the second category will be considered: participants' fluency.

Many learners consider themselves fluent in a language when they feel comfortable and confident when communicating or when they can take part in a conversation easily, but fluency goes beyond that.

When researchers study fluency, they use two fairly simple measurements; one is the rate of speech, how many syllables you produce over a given time, the second is the length of utterances, how many words you can produce in a continued string of speech without hesitation or pauses. (Jones, 2020, p.3)

Then, it can be said that fluency includes different dimensions, the quantitative dimension such as the number of syllables or length of utterances over a given time, and the qualitative dimension: how confident or comfortable a speaker is when using the language in a conversation in a daily life context. Tavakoli (2020) describes two kinds of fluency: utterance fluency and perceived fluency. "Utterance fluency relates to the measurable aspects of fluency; and perceived fluency represents the inferences listeners make about speakers' cognitive fluency based on their perceptions of the speech that they hear."(Tavakoli, 2020 p.170)

From the two areas described above, this action research study focused on utterance fluency because it encloses measurable aspects like the following:

- Speech rate: the number of words per minute for a speech sample.

- Fluency breakdown: the average length of pauses at the end of AS units.

- Repair: the number of strings in a speech sample that are repeated with some modifications to syntax, morphology, or word order, among others. (Skehan, 2009)

## The role of Information Gap Activities to promote speaking fluency

To improve students' speaking fluency, one communicative activity that has gained fame because of its several advantages is the use of information gap activities. Larseen-Freeman (2003, p.65) states that "an information-gap task is a technique in which learners are missing the needed information to complete a task or solve a problem, and they have to communicate with their classmates to fill in the gaps". These kinds of activities are meaningful because they emulate what really happens in real life communication every day. "To complete the task, students must reduce or eliminate the information gap; the language is a tool, not an end in itself." (Decker, 2012, p.27)

It can be remarked that information gap activities give students the chance to share information while they are involved in reaching the same purpose. As Harris (1990) states, information gap is the best technique for second language learners; it can provide learners with a good opportunity to use the sentences they learn, it also allows learners to talk, exchange information, and interact over time, and the tasks will make the lesson more interesting and motivate the learner to speak more than their teacher.

## Previous Studies about information gap activities as a collaborative learning strategy

Previous studies have shown that these activities allow students to talk and interact in a meaningful way. For instance, in recent research conducted by Rini (2017) after using information gap activities with a group of seventh-grade students, she concluded the participants had improved their speaking fluency better than those who were not exposed to information gap activities. In addition, Ortiz (2019) stated that after using information gap activities with a group of 23 eighth-graders students, information gap activities positively impacted students' oral fluency, allowing them to interact and use the language to communicate. Likewise, Linaanti (2017) conducted action research with 28 eighth graders who used information gap activities for almost a month; the findings of the research showed an improvement in participant's oral fluency.

# Method

## Type of Study

The present study corresponds to action research as it aims to act towards a situation that needed to be improved and at the same time produced new information. As Burns (2015) states: "Action research (AR) is a research approach that is grounded in practical action (the action component) while at the same time focused on generating theory (the research component). These two components work in combination" (p.1). In the present action research, the teacher-researcher noticed in her classes that her group of nine-year old students were not fluent in the use of the English language at the time of speaking. They hardly produced complete and coherent messages. To solve this problem, an intervention plan was designed, which involved the use of information gap activities in the English lessons to increase students' engagement, their motivation and their talking time in real communication. A mixed method approach was adopted. A quantitative approach was used to compare the participants' improvement in their language fluency through a pre-test and a post-test applied before and after the intervention; and a qualitative approach to analyze their perceptions about the experience.

## Participants

The sampling for this study corresponds to a purposive sampling. "In this type of sampling, according to the purpose of the study, the members for a sample are selected. It is also called deliberate sampling" (Bhardwaj, 2019, p.161). The sample was made up of a group of seven ninth graders who had been learning English for two years with a grammar-focused methodology, with no time for developing interactive speaking activities. The participant's ages ranged between 14 and 15 years old with a very basic level of English (they do not meet the standards established by the National Curriculum Design for Primary Education of Honduras for ninth grade). These students attend a public high school in a vulnerable context in Lamani, a town located in the central region of Honduras. In this context, the public education system does not give much importance to English teaching. Therefore, these students have been learning English for two years, two chronological hours a week.

At the time the intervention was conducted, they were in their third year of English language learning, but they struggled to produce short sentences, and they were not used to developing speaking activities in class.

## Procedure

This study started as a piloting experience, in which the researcher had the opportunity to use the pre-test and measure how much language the participants

could produce in the activities planned and how much time they took to finish the task. The pre and post-test consisted of information gap activities designed with the content participants were learning in these months, such as asking and giving personal information, and expressing likes and dislikes. After the piloting, the researcher introduced the strategy by explaining key concepts related to the concept of fluency, such as fluency itself, speech rate, breakdowns, repairs, and the guidelines to use information gap activities.

When the participants were familiarized with these critical concepts, the researcher applied the pre-test to assess their initial level of fluency. After this, seven sessions using information gap activities following the regular ninth-grade topics were conducted. Then, the researcher applied the post-test to measure the participants' level of fluency after the intervention and their perceptions about the experience.

## Data Analysis Tools

To analyze the quantitative data collected from the pre and post-test, the researcher used an analytic rubric that included three fluency aspects: speech rate, pauses, and repairs;  descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency, particularly, the mean score, mean score difference, and standard deviation of the scores the participants got in the pre and post-test. The data obtained from the participants' perceptions through the focus group was video- recorded, and transcribed. The researcher coded the data identifying different categories following the thematic analysis stages suggested by Braun and Clark (2006): familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining, and naming.

## Findings

The data gathered in this research are presented according to each specific objective defined for this action research.

*SO1: To assess the use of information gap activities to support the student's speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs*

To assess the usefulness of the information gap activities to improve learners' speaking fluency in terms of their speech rate, breakdowns or pauses, and repairs, the participants' mean scores, mean differences, and standard deviation were calculated in both the pre and the post-test. The maximum score in the analytic rubric used to evaluate students' fluency was 12 points. The participants' scores are shown in Table 1.

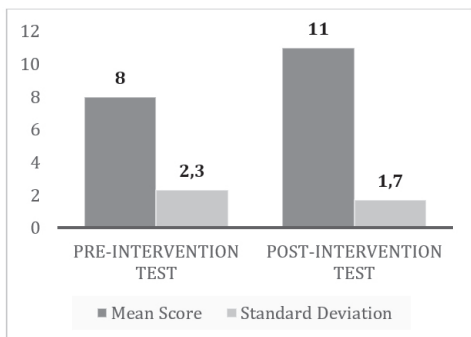*Table 1.* Participants' Scores, in the Pre and Post-test.

| Participants | Fluency Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
| | Score | Percentage of Achievement | Score | Percentage of Achievement |
| Student 1 | 4 | 33% | 8 | 67% |
| Student 2 | 10 | 83% | 12 | 100% |
| Student 3 | 10 | 83% | 12 | 100% |
| Student 4 | 8 | 67% | 9 | 75% |
| Student 5 | 7 | 58% | 10 | 83% |
| Student 6 | 10 | 83% | 12 | 100% |
| Student 7 | 10 | 83% | 12 | 100% |
| **Mean Score** | **8** | **67%** | **11** | **92%** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **2.3** | | **1.7** | |

Source: Self-elaboration

As shown in Table 1, there was an improvement in the participants' speaking fluency after the intervention. It can be clearly observed in the post-test final mean score, which was 11 points, representing 92% of achievement compared with 67% of achievement in the pre-test with a mean score of 8 points. It can also be noticed that in the pre-test, none of the students achieved 100% of the task, but in the post-test, 4 students (50% of the participants) got a 100% of achievement. It is also important to highlight that the lowest improvement was 8% of achievement achieved by student 4. In conclusion, all participants showed an improvement in their fluency level.

Regarding the standard deviation of the pre-test reached 2.3. This standard deviation is high; thus, it demonstrates a low level of reliability in the pre-test results because there was a high variation among the participants' scores. The standard deviation of the post-test results is 1.7, which means that participants' scores were much closer to the media score which was 11. This low standard deviation indicates the data is reliable as the results are more homogenous. The mean score and standard deviation differences between the participants' fluency in the pre-test and the post-test are displayed in Figure 1.

*Figure 1.* Comparison of the mean score and standard deviation between the pre and post-test.



Source: Self-elaboration

To analyze more in-depth the participants' improvement in their fluency level, it is necessary to look closely at each fluency aspect assessed. Table 2 shows participants' speech rate scores.

*Table 2.* Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of speech rate

| Participants | Speech Rate | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
| | Score | Level | Score | Level |
| Student 1 | 2 | Deficient | 3 | Very good |
| Student 2 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 3 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 4 | 2 | Deficient | 2 | Deficient |
| Student 5 | 1 | Poor | 3 | Very good |
| Student 6 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 7 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| **Mean Score** | **2.4** | **Deficient** | **3.4** | **Very good** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **0.8** | | **0.8** | |

Source: Self-elaboration

As it can be observed in Table 3, most of the participants (86%) improved their level of speech rate in the post test because in the pre-test some of them were placed in

the "Poor" (14%) "Deficient" (29%) and some in the "Very Good"(57%) level of speech rate. Only student N° 4, did not show any difference in the speech rate level after the intervention being placed in the same category (Deficient). It can be said that students' speech rate improved after the intervention, as the mean score from the pre-test was 2.4 (Deficient category), and the mean score from the post-test was 3.4 (Very Good category). It can also be observed that the results of the pre-test had a dispersion of 0.8 from the mean score of 2.4, which means that most of the students' speech rates, before the intervention, were close to a "Deficient" level. The standard deviation from the post-test was 0.8 from the mean score of 3.4. Both standard deviations were very low, meaning there was not much variation in the scores, which shows a high degree of reliability in the data. Table 3 shows students' scores in terms of their level of pauses or breakdowns.

*Table 3.* Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of pauses and breakdwons.

| Participants | Pauses or Breakdowns | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
| | Score | Level | Score | Level |
| Student 1 | 1 | Poor | 3 | Very good |
| Student 2 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 3 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 4 | 2 | Deficient | 3 | Very good |
| Student 5 | 3 | Very good | 3 | Very good |
| Student 6 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 7 | 4 | Excellent | 4 | Excellent |
| **Mean Score** | **2.7** | **Very good** | **3.6** | **Excellent** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **0.9** | | **0.5** | |

Source: Self-elaboration

In Table 3 it can be observed that the most common level of pauses in the pre-test was found in the descriptor "Very Good" with a 57% of achievement, also it can be noticed that only one student got the lowest grade or Poor level of pauses before the intervention. In contrast, in the post-test results, none of the students showed a Poor level of pauses; they all got a Very Good or Excellent level. The pre-test mean score was 2.7 points (Very Good level), and the post-test mean score was 3.6, which showed an improvement of 0.9 points. The dispersion of results of the pre-test was 0.9 points from the mean score, so the scores were not very dispersed from the mean score. Furthermore, the standard deviation from the post-test results was 0.5 points. If

compared to the standard deviations of both tests, there was a decrease of 0.4 during the post-test, which means that the participants' scores became even less spread, and closer to the mean score due to the improvement made in the post-intervention test.

The third fluency aspect evaluated was the level of repairs, which refered to the number of repeated sentences with modifications. Table 4 displays the learners' results in this aspect.

*Table 4.* Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of repairs.

| Participants | Repairs | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | |
| | Score | Level | Score | Level |
| Student 1 | 1 | Poor | 2 | Deficient |
| Student 2 | 4 | Excellent | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 3 | 4 | Excellent | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 4 | 4 | Excellent | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 5 | 3 | Very Good | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 6 | 4 | Excellent | 4 | Excellent |
| Student 7 | 3 | Very good | 4 | Excellent |
| **Mean Score** | **3.3** | **Very good** | **3.7** | **Excellent** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **1.1** | | | |

Source: Self-elaboration

According to Table 7, most of the students demonstrated Excellent or Very Good initial level of repairs, this means they repeated the sentences with modifications very few times in the beginning. However, in the post-test, 90% of the students got the best score or showed an Excellent level of repairs. Regarding the mean scores, there was a small difference of 0.4 points between the pre and post-test, thus the pre-test mean score was 3.3 and the post-test mean score was 3.7. The dispersion of the results from the pre-test scores was 1.1 points, which is the aspect with the most dispersed results from the mean value; this implies that there was not a stable or consistent performance of participants in this aspect during the pre-test, which showed a low-reliability level. Furthermore, the standard deviation of the post-test results was 0.7 points. This standard deviation means the participants' scores became less spread and closer to the mean score.

The improvement in the three aspects assessed (speech rate, pauses or breakdowns, and repairs) is displayed in figure 3.

*Figure 3.* Comparison of mean scores of each fluency aspect assessed: Speech rate, breadowns and repairs.
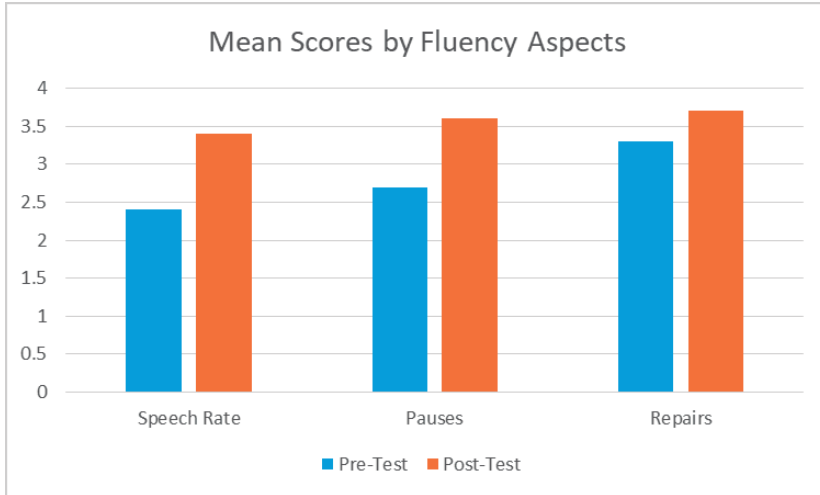


Before the intervention participants showed a mean score that was placed in the Deficient descriptor in **speech rate,** which meant that they were not able to produce any sentence with evenness and flow; in terms of **breakdowns**, participants showed a mean score that corresponded to a Very Good level, in other words, their sentences were sometimes interrupted by pauses; in the **repairs** aspect, participants got a mean score that corresponded to a Very Good level so the sentences they produced were sometimes repeated with modifications. The aspect that demonstrated a greater improvement was **pauses or breakdowns,** and the aspect that showed the lowest improvement was **repairs**.

***SO2: To analyze the learners' perception regarding the use of information gap activities to support their speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs.***

To analyze participants' views about the process of using information gap activities to support their speaking fluency, a focus group was conducted in their mother tongue and the participants' opinions and perspectives on the topic were analyzed through a thematic analysis. Table 5 shows the thematic analysis of the students' perceptions gathered during the focus group.

*Table 5.* Thematic Analysis of the participants' perceptions of information gap activities.

| Themes | Subthemes | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Information gap activities support in speaking fluency. | 1. Improvement of the fluency level. | 6 |
| | 2. No change in the fluency before and after the intervention | 1 |
| Contribution of information gap activities to improve participant's speech rate. | 1. Improvement of the speech rate. | 2 |
| Contribution of information gap activities to improve participant's level of pauses or breakdows. | 1.Improvement of the level of pauses | 5 |
| | 2. No change in the level of pauses before and after the intervention. | 1 |
| Participants' awareness of mistakes using information gap activities | 1. The were no repairs before because participants were not aware of the mistakes | 7 |
| | 2. There were more repairs during the use IGA. | 6 |
| Appropriate time for the development of Information gap activities. | 1. More time for developing the IGA. | 4 |
| | 2. More time for both the presentation of the language and for the devolvement of the IGA | 2 |
| Use of information gap activities in the English Classes. | 1. Increase of speaking time during English classes due to the use of information gap activities. | 4 |
| | 2. There is more time to use the language communicatively when using IGA. | 7 |
| | 3. Students' motivation about the use of IGA. | 7 |

Source: Self-elaboration

The analysis of Figure 4 is addressed starting by the sub-themes with the most frequent answers, which were: "There is more time to use the language communicatively when using IGA", "Student's motivation about the use of IGA" and "There were no repairs before (the intervention) because participants were not aware of the mistakes". All the participants (7 participants, 100%) supported these ideas strongly. This showed that all of them agreed that using this technique during the English classes gave them the opportunity to interact with their classmates and learn at the same time, and this triggered their motivation. Even though motivation and the communicative use of the language were not strictly related to the objectives of the research, they emerged with a high level of frequency during the focus group.

The third sub-theme in which 100% of the participants agreed was related to the level of repairs: "There were no repairs before (the intervention) because participants

were not aware of the mistakes". This theme might have emerged because participants could not compare if they had had more or fewer repairs before the intervention as they had never experienced this kind of oral interactive activity where they could identify their mistakes and correct themselves while speaking. In fact, this is portrayed in the pre-test results, which showed that the highest score (3.3) of the three aspects assessed was achieved in the level of repairs, meaning that students had very few repairs before the intervention.

According to the participants' perceptions, the use of information gap activities helped them to improve their fluency level, 90% of them agreed that they had noticed a significant change all along the process of using information gap activities, which is evidenced in the results of the post-test. Regarding the speech rate, 28% of the participants expressed that they could speak faster or with a better flow than before the intervention, even though most of them (90%) improved their test scores in this aspect. In terms of the level of pauses or breakdowns, 71% of the participants expressed a contribution of information gap activities to their level of pauses or breakdowns. They said that they used to produce more pauses or breakdowns before the intervention, which is in agreement with the mean value difference registered in this aspect in the pre and post-test, that was 0.9.

## Discussion

Data analysis results showed that information gap activities effectively helped the group of Honduran ninth-grade students to improve their speaking fluency level. This was observed in the results of the pre and post-intervention tests. The pre-test mean score was 8 out of 12, and in the post-test, the mean score was 11 out of 12; there was an improvement of 3 points.

To thoroughly analyze this improvement, it is necessary to consider the three aspects of fluency that were assessed: speech rate, pauses or breakdowns, and repairs. The most remarkable improvement was registered in the level of speech rate; thus, participants got an increment of 1 point of difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-test. In terms of pauses, there was an improvement of 0.9 points in the mean scores. Still, the best score after the intervention was in the level of repairs, as participants got a mean score of 3.7 out of 4, meaning that they had an excellent level of repairs after using information gap activities.

It can be said that after using information gap activities during a period, the ninth-grade students were able to produce sentences with a better speech rate, with fewer pauses, and repeating or modifying fewer sentences. These results are in line with what Ortiz (2019) concluded after conducting action research using information gap activities with 28 eighth graders; he affirmed information gap activities impacted

students' oral fluency, as they could produce utterances that were characterized by evenness and flow and with very occasionally hesitations and rephrasing. These results are also similar to the ones gathered by Rini (2017) and Linaanti (2017). They found that students' scores of fluency levels were higher in the post-test after using information gap activities in the intervention.

It is verified that information gap activities help to improve speech rate and reduce the number of repetitions of words, phrases, or clauses, and the number of lexico-syntactic reformulations for correction or repairs according to action research conducted by Namaziandost et al. (2019).

Regarding the participants' perceptions about the use of information gap activities as a support for their level of speaking fluency. The data gathered through the focus groups showed that their perceptions were in agreement with the quantitative results because 90% (6 answers) of them agreed that they had noticed an improvement in their fluency level after using information gap activities. In terms of pauses or breakdowns, 71% of the participants reported a reduction in the pauses after the intervention. However, in the aspect of speech rate, the students' perceptions differed from their results in the pre and post-test, because only 2 (28%) reported an improvement in their speech rate, even though 90% did improve their speech rate level in the post-test.

At the level of repairs, the participants provided some interesting opinions. They expressed that they did not have any level of repairs before the intervention, this might be due to the novelty of information gap activities because they have never experienced this kind of activity in which they could identify the mistakes and correct them while speaking. Therefore, a new benefit of using information gap activities arose "Getting awareness of mistakes "this perception was supported by 100% of the participants who agreed that before the intervention they were not aware of their mistakes and how to repair them. This result is supported by what Mumford and Darn (2020) said: When learners are motivated to speak, they produce more language, and they become "hypothesis testers" and "risk takers" thus they make more mistakes, but they are capable of self-correction.

Two other themes emerged during the focus group: "The communicative use of the languages through information gap activities" and "Students' motivation towards information gap activities". Some of them expressed that in class, before the intervention, they had not had opportunities to use the language communicatively as they just practiced the grammar rules in a written way. Information gap activities allowed them to use the grammar knowledge they already had in conversations instead of the traditional use of the textbook. When completing an information gap activity, students' conversations emulate what happens in an authentic context using English. As Prabhu, 1987 (as cited in Namaziandost, 2019,) stated, "information gap activities give the opportunity to work on negotiation meaning, enable learners to feel comfortable to speak, and increase communicative practice maximally." (p.13)

Regarding motivation, all of them strongly supported the idea that they felt more motivated in class using information gap activities. These perceptions were similar to the results got it by Humaera et al. (2022) in a recent study, in which the analysis revealed that "implementing information gap activities in the classroom while teaching English increased students' willingness to communicate; they got motivated and confident to speak, they also improved their behavioral intention to communicate" (p.1)

## Limitations

Some limitations were found during the implementation of this action research: for example, holding the intervention sessions online caused the main drawbacks to the development of the action plan, which were related to technical problems. Participants had a lot of connectivity issues and technical difficulties during the process.

There were also some challenges during the intervention. The first one was the fact that students took longer than expected to understand the instructions to complete the information gap activities. Considering this aspect, the researcher concluded that explaining the instructions is a key point for the effectiveness of this kind of activity.

## Implications

Regardless of the limitations, some methodological implications are worth considering. To begin with, the information gap activities that were used during the intervention sessions were adapted following the regular topic proposed by the National Curriculum of Honduran for ninth graders. Therefore, information gap activities can be designed for each topic and thus be implemented in English classes in the context of the public system to reduce the grammatical focus and build a more interactive and communicative environment.

As a suggestion, because of the positive results evidenced, the National Secretariat of Education of Honduras could incorporate information gap activities to bolster the communicative and task-based approach suggested in the National Curriculum.

## Conclusions

The use of information gap activities as a didactic strategy to improve the student's level of oral fluency is recommended based on the results of the pre and post-test, which demonstrated that after the intervention students improved their level of oral fluency by 3 points, getting in the final post-test a mean score of 11 out of 12 points, while in the pre-test they had only got 8 points.

In addition, information gap activities are suggested as a collaborative learning strategy based on the positive perceptions of participants, who expressed that the use of this type of activities allowed them to use the language communicatively and this triggered their motivation.

It is important to highlight that during the focus group, students manifested a strong desire to use information gap activities in their regular English classes. Since when the researcher asked them the questions: if the teacher could use information gap activities in each regular English Class, what would you think about it? A 43% of them said that they liked the idea.

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# Future Teachers Discuss their Readiness to Teach EFL in Ecuador: A Qualitative Approach[1]

## Futuros docentes analizan su preparación para enseñar inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador: un enfoque cualitativo

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## Abstract

This work examines Ecuadorian teacher trainees' self-reported pedagogy. Data gathered in focus groups documents participant' pedagogy, what they stated they learned about teaching in diverse contexts, and the challenges they anticipate as they prepare to begin careers as English language teachers. A constant comparison method was used to determine and cross-reference emergent themes in the data. Findings suggest a disconnect between the objectives of trainees' program of study and what the future teachers stated they need to know to be ready to implement in their practice.

**Keywords:** Teacher training, diversity, Ecuador, English language teaching, teacher professional development, qualitative research

## Resumen

Este trabajo examina la pedagogía autoinformada de los maestros aprendices ecuatorianos. Los datos recopilados en grupos focales documentan la pedagogía de los participantes, lo que declararon que aprendieron sobre la enseñanza en contextos diversos y los desafíos que anticipan confrontarán cuando comiencen sus carreras como maestros de inglés. Se utilizó un método de comparación constante para determinar y hacer referencias cruzadas de temas emergentes en los datos. Los hallazgos sugieren una desconexión entre los objetivos del programa de estudio de los aprendices y los conocimientos que los futuros maestros consideran que necesitarán estar listos para implementar en su práctica.

**Palabras claves:** Formación docente, diversidad, Ecuador, enseñanza del idioma inglés, desarrollo profesional docente, investigación cualitativa

## Resumo

Este trabalho examina a pedagogia autorrelatada por estudantes de formação de professores equatorianos. Dados coletados em grupos focais documentam a pedagogia dos participantes, o que afirmaram ter aprendido sobre o ensino em contextos diversos e os desafios que antecipam ao se prepararem para iniciar carreiras como professores de língua inglesa. Um método de comparação constante foi utilizado para determinar e cruzar temas emergentes nos dados. Os resultados sugerem uma desconexão entre os objetivos do programa de estudo dos aprendizes e o que os futuros professores afirmaram precisar saber para estar prontos para implementar em sua prática.

**Palavras-chave:** Formação de professores, diversidade, Equador, ensino de língua inglesa, desenvolvimento profissional de professores, pesquisa qualitativa.

## Introduction to Educational Reforms in Ecuador

In the past decade, Ecuadorian teachers have experienced increased pressure to design innovative curricula (Van Damme et al. 2013; Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador 2011). With Ecuador adopting the United States (U.S.) dollar as its currency, the study of English became a requirement across all grade levels (British Council, 2015; Gallegos, 2008). This was preceded by the 1988 impetus for educational changes, with the government focusing on validating the cultures of indigenous groups and providing support for a resurgence of all native languages. At the time, schools were established with the goal of delivering intercultural bilingual education for all indigenous cultures (Ministerio de Educación, 2013). Mandates met strong criticism, primarily the speed at which revisions were put in place without piloting the efficacy of program components (Mesa Educación Pachakutik, 2002). Practicing teachers, future teachers, and students at levels kindergarten-twelfth (K-12) are challenged to develop high levels of language proficiency in Spanish and in an additional language such as English or an indigenous tongue. Efforts resulted in Ecuadorians mixing Spanish and indigenous tongues to create third languages such as Kichwañol, which is half Spanish and half Kichwa (Ministerio de Educación, 2013).

Added pressure on practicing teachers relates to the methods used to evaluate their competency. Future teachers need to be prepared for life in Ecuador's schools as evaluation of teachers' competency is based largely on K-12 students' academic success, and the teachers' ability to demonstrate how they address learners' cultural and linguistic needs (Ecuador Immediato, 2016; Cevallos-Estarellas & Bromwell, 2015; Resultados Pruebas Censales, 2008; Ministerio de Educación y Cultura del Ecuador, 2006). The Ser Estudiante exam (Resultados Pruebas Censales, 2008) administered to students, is used to measure learners' academic achievement, teachers' competency and the overall success of the movement for educational improvement. Results inform the foci of revisions to curricular design, the Ministry of Education's selection of curricular materials, and the time allocated for instruction across the disciplines. This study explores teacher candidates (future teachers') perceptions of their readiness to teach in Ecuador's diverse context, the challenges they anticipate they might encounter in their work as educators, and how governmental mandates for English language teaching (ELT) influenced their preparation.

Ecuador's Diversity and Schooling Demands

Ecuador's cultural and linguistic diversity is visible in the numerous living languages spoken across this nation. According to Ethnologue (2019), there are 21 indigenous languages (e.g., Cofán, and Quechua) (Constitución Política del Ecuador, 1998). The Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (2015) documented that 93% of Ecuador's population speaks Castilian and 4.1% speak Quechua. Census information reflected the country's population was composed of 71.9% mestizos (mixed Amerindian and

white), 7.4% Montubio, 7% Amerindian, 6.1% white, 4.3% Afroecuadorian, 1.9% mulato, 1% black, and 0.4% other (INEC, 2015). The Ecuadorian educational system is challenged to understand and address the cultural diversity present in the nation's classrooms. Preparing future educators to design and implement culturally responsive curricula is therefore essential, given Ecuador's diverse demographic (Banks, 2014, 1981; Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011; Nieto 2018), and the mandate for English instruction (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). The addition of English to the curriculum, across all grades for private schools and 8th – 12th grades for public schools, has raised the level of pedagogical expertise and inter-cultural understandings required of future teachers (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2011). In addition, the demands on students to master English has likely added the study of English as an additional language to what may already compose an overcrowded curricular schedule. The question remaining is how efficiently institutions are able to adjust programs of study to prepare the country's future educators for the tasks of teaching plurilingual populations of students in the process of reaching mastery of English as a second language.

## Theoretical Framework

Teachers' ability to reflect on the norms of their own culture and how their attitudes influence their pedagogy, is a factor when examining an educator's ability to establish empowering schools (Bennett, 2019; Giroux & Silva, 2010). These researchers consider that educators' respect of students' cultures and languages are key factors in ELT (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). Beginning in the late 1970s, linguists sought to teach language as an event that had as its focus the communicative competence of the participants (Canale & Swain, 1980). Today, teacher educators are tasked with preparing future teachers able to communicate in academic and economic arenas represented by Ecuador's plurilingual and pluricultural populations. Candidates need to have linguistic knowledge and in-depth familiarity with the cultural norms of all the cultures present in Ecuador and in the English speaking world. In this millennium, culturally responsive teachers are committed to equity in schooling and to ensuring that students' rights are recognized in the enacted curriculum, and in the participatory methods they use to instruct diverse learners (Author, 2017, 2016; Hawkins and Norton 2009; Kincheloe 2008). As such, in second language acquisition (SLA), students' familial backgrounds, their languages and the norms of their communities, are treasure troves for future teachers who know that investigating learners' out of school experiences will help them improve their curriculum and methods for ELT (Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011; González et al., 2005; Ruiz, 1984). When one considers the affective domain and how learners' concentration on monitoring conversations both controls and limits their output (Krashen, 1981), it is evident that SLA methods that lean towards critical pedagogy and the awareness that language is a right (Ruiz,

1984), allow learners to more freely express their thoughts as they learn about the cultural norms of speakers of other languages (Freire, 1985). In this investigation, 28 future teachers' shared their vision of what educational equity requires of them in Ecuador's multilingual-multicultural society. Data gathered served to examine how well the participants felt they were prepared to begin their teaching careers while finishing internships in which they were asked to use SLA methods assigned by their mentors. This inquiry into future educators' teaching practices, and how they perceive their role in affirming all learners' rights in the EFL class, sheds light on the systemic challenges facing the Ecuadorian educational system. This research explored teacher candidates' perceptions of how the teacher preparation curriculum addressed the need for future teachers to examine learners' funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) and aimed to identify the instructional methods that candidates will use to deliver effective and culturally responsive instruction after graduation (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994: Gay, 2018; Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ramos Pellicia, 2020).

## English Teacher Preparation

The Organic Law of Intercultural Education law focused on preparing teachers to teach English as a subject. The constitutional mandate, Decree 0041-014, (Ministerio de Educación, 2014) required English instruction from the 8th (12-13 years old) through the 12th grade (17-18 years old) levels in the country's public schools. Thus, teachers' English language proficiency was evaluated, using standardized international tests approved by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education selects and assigns English teachers to schools based on tests that require a minimum 70% of points (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.). The assessment aligns to the Acuerdo Ministerial Nro. MINEDUC-ME-2017-00065-A; which forecasted an announcement calling for the evaluation of all English teachers who desired to prove eligibility for EFL teaching vacancies (Ministerio de Educación, 2017).

Before the reform, teachers were trained in schools identified as *Normales*, which were training colleges for teachers of all levels and specialties. Future teachers studies topics such as pedagogy, psychology, and statistics. By the third year of the trainees' education, a specialization such as the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) could be selected. This added two years of training and study of subjects such as English history, English literature, and English grammar (Hoboud, 2009). In 1998, a national mandate (Decreto Ejecutivo, 203) created the Dirección Nacional de Educacion Indígena Intercultural Bilingue (DINEIB) to meet the needs of indigenous groups (Krainer, 1999). The Ministry of Education implemented the System of Intercultural Bilingual Education (Modelo del Sistema de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe) (MOSEIB) model to account for cultural and linguistic diversity as implemented through the Acuerdo Ministerial N. 112 (Krainer, 1999).

At the end of 2006, the Ministry of Education initiated conversations about education in the public discourse which led to the development of the Plan Decenal (PD) 2006-2015 [Ten-Year Education Plan] and the renewal of the PD for 2016-2025 as the plan to improve the educational system (Franco Pombo, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2006; Ministerio de Educación, 2018), and methods for teaching English (Fortalecimiento del Ingles, n.d.). During the process of the education reform, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Council (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación) was transformed to not only assess the work of the university professors in preparing future teachers, but also to assess the qualifications of the academic faculty to guarantee the outcome of high-quality EFL educators. At this time, the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education Council (Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de Educación Superior) was put in place (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017). The English standards were changed and enacted during 2012-2013 to ensure quality instruction for students to meet desired English proficiency levels (Diaz Maggioli, 2017). However, the number of English teachers in 2014 that met a proficiency level for B2 (Upper Intermediate), totalled 4,500 (2%), a number that was not sufficient to meet the needs of the education system (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017).

To address the need to better prepare teachers to teach English, educators from the U.S. and Ecuador collaborated to develop a standards-based model for Ecuador's sociocultural context (Serrano et al., 2015). Ecuador's government signed agreements with the Alliance of Progress from the U.S. and the British Council. Five universities from the U.S., New Mexico State, Kansas State, the University of Kentucky, Valparaiso University and the University of Mississippi provided assistantships for practicing teachers and select future teachers to study English (Ambrecht, 2014). The professional development program, Teach English 2014, aimed to raise Ecuadorian teachers' English proficiency and teach them constructivist ELT methods. Government grants helped finance continued studies, providing teachers opportunities to study in the U.S. one academic year, and have numerous opportunities to interact with native English speakers and educators (Ministerio de Educación, 2013). However, insufficient provisions were made to support study abroad programs for adequate numbers of future teachers.

## Brief History of Methods Used for ELT in Ecuador

Dating back to the 1990s, Ecuador's Ministry of Education identified English as the world's lingua franca for the economic development of the population and country (Diaz Maggioli, 2017; Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017). The focus of ELT was communication and meaning making. In Ecuador, the curriculum was purported to focus on content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Achieving the objectives of CLIL was problematic given teachers' level of English proficiency (El Telégrafo, 2014).

The challenge that remained was how to prepare teachers to consider the roles of CLIL and communicative language teaching (CLT), and how both may be effective within the Ecuadorian context (Santín et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education of Ecuador (Ministerio del Ecuador, 2016) identified the major goals of ELT are to help learners understand other cultures, be able to participate in global exchanges that use English, plus foster an appreciation for learning languages These goals reflect CLT and not CLIL.

A problem to effective ELT noted by this article's authors, is that educational revisions for teaching English in Ecuador, and the rationale for selecting methods, seem to be based on models from the United States (Canale & Swain, 1980; Cummins, 1979; Krashen, 1981; Rosa & Burdick, 2017). These researchers ask if recommendations from the Council of Europe (2003), which have evolved from CLT and CLIL, and support models of SLA that validate all languages of plurilingual societies, have been considered for Ecuador's sociocultural context.

## Study Methodology

A qualitative methodology was implemented to conduct an in-depth examination of future teachers' perceptions related to their readiness to teach in Ecuador's diverse context. Participants were completing the second term of a one-year required internship placement in their teacher training program. Before participation in this study, and to comply with ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board involving and to protect the rights, welfare and wellbeing of human subjects, participants signed informed consent forms prior to participation in this study and before data were gathered.

The inquiry approach used focus group as the vehicle to guide the conversations, and document future teachers' beliefs about their preparation to begin a successful teaching career as EFL educators (Cresswell, 2012). A constant comparison analysis technique was used to determine the emergent themes. The constant comparison process was chosen because it allows for coding of the data based on meaningful parts of the text and comparison of the codes to form themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Miles et al., 2014). Analysis of emergent and recurrent themes in the data served to determine participants' perceptions of their ability to design and deliver culturally responsive English instruction. Salient themes evidenced in the focus groups data were analyzed to determine barriers to learning and grouped under perceptions and practices. For example, keeping in mind understandings of the funds of knowledge, a participant indicated "I need to know the students' environment and culture" this statement was categorized under Teacher Trainee's Perceptions and Practices. Another participant stated "I may not be familiar with the student's living context", this statement was categorized under barriers to learning efficacy.

Questions guiding this study were:

SQ 1: What teaching practices do Ecuador's future EFL teachers state they feel qualified to implement?

SQ 2: What barriers do teacher candidates perceive will challenge them in their careers as EFL educators?

## Participants and Setting

Future teachers (candidates) who voluntarily participated in this study (n=28) were in their last semester of their teacher preparation program to become EFL teachers. Candidates were enrolled in the second half of a two-semester internship at Borges University (a pseudonym), a private institution located in an urban area of Ecuador. Prior to the beginning of internships, the candidates prepared lesson plans which were approved by the mentoring teacher of the classroom where they were placed. During the internships, the candidates were formatively evaluated by their mentors (Pedagogía de los idiomas nacionales y extranjeros: UTN Accreditada, 2018).

## Focus groups

Four focus groups consisting of six to nine participants per group were conducted with future teachers ranging in age from 21 to 25 years of age. Focus groups were used to gather the data because the time assigned to the researchers to collect the data did not allow for one-to-one interviews. Participants were asked the following questions:

Q1: What have you learned about teaching in diverse contexts in your teacher preparation program?

Q2: What challenges do you think you might encounter as you begin your career as an English teacher?

Q3: What pedagogies will you implement in your teaching?

## Data Analyses: Focus groups with Future Teachers

Across focus groups, future teachers (candidates) identified educational practices that they believe need to be applied to teach effectively and to overcome existing barriers to learning efficacy. They were not hesitant to mention what they needed to learn and stated what had not been covered adequately in their university program. Recurrent themes were cross-referenced with what the professional literature recommends is

necessary to teach effectively in diverse contexts (Bennett, 2019; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; González et al., 2005; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Kincheloe, 2008; Vygotsky, 1986; Freire, 1985; Ruiz, 1984).

## Findings

This study sought to examine candidates' beliefs at the end of their formal preparation to become EFL teachers. Focus group information was used to identify salient themes which provided evidence of teacher trainees' knowledge and readiness for the profession. Participants acknowledged the importance of utilizing different strategies to make learning engaging and voiced their perception that EFL educators need to use didactic materials that reflect topics that are familiar to the students. A recurrent theme which yielded many comments was how to effectively assess and evaluate teaching efficacy such as "assessing school student's understanding and comprehension", "assessing knowledge through classroom activities", "written assessments", "use of worksheets, practical exercises, and conversational tests". While positive aspects of practice were mentioned by the candidates, themes such as students' academic challenges ("school students do not have the necessary materials"), parent involvement ("parents do not support students learning a new language"), levels of formal instruction about multiculturalism ("We have not learned about multiculturalism concepts") and the use of differentiated strategies in teaching ("we develop our own materials and we don't have time to create several activities"), were not as strongly articulated in terms of their replicability across EFL classes. Thus, in analysis of this study's findings, the latter salient themes were interpreted as barriers to teaching efficacy.

Regarding SQ1, What teaching practices and educational philosophies do Ecuador's future EFL teachers share being prepared to implement?, participants mentioned affective aspects of learning such as learners' funds of knowledge and utilizing family and community background in relation to the subject manner. Comments included "the teacher needs to know the cultural context of the student", "classrooms in rural areas do not have adequate space to teach", "parents do not provide the needed materials", "my institution did not provide a curriculum that addressed multiculturalism", "well-prepared teachers are needed in the rural areas due to the student's needs", "communities are not supportive of teaching English", and "teachers should include the students' cultural background into the lesson plans". Teacher candidates acknowledged the importance of implementing differentiated instruction based on students' affective and academic needs as impacted by culture, and the value of examining data from formative and summative assessments. Candidates commented that in their internships they were using "different evaluation techniques", as other classmates nodded in agreement. The information suggests that candidates see teaching as a set of practices where the cultural background of the students assists

the teacher to present the content material in ways that better meet the needs of the students.

Concerning SQ2, What barriers do teacher candidates perceive will challenge them in their careers as EFL educators?, teacher candidates pointed out barriers they might encounter such as limited flexibility for adjusting the curriculum to students' backgrounds; their preparation to incorporate multicultural components in instructional strategies; and their desire to have innovative materials to teach culturally and linguistically diverse groups of students. Participants expressed "I adjust instruction based on my assessment of all the pupils", "I don't have a systematic approach to adjust instruction", "teachers should learn about other cultures", and "we have not learned about multicultural concepts or strategies". Since teacher candidates were completing classroom internships prior to graduation, comments about barriers were assumed to express perceptions formed during their internship.

## Discussion of Findings

Analysis of the findings generated four salient themes related to the candidates' perceptions about their qualification and readiness as future EFL educators. The first theme related to instructional strategies to be used in the classroom. The second theme revealed different approaches to engage students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The third theme presented candidates' perceptions about their preparation to support diverse students. The fourth theme uncovered candidates' interactions with parents.

## Instructional strategies

According to Frederick et al., (2015), educators often fail to address the affective needs that composed students' self-identity, self-efficacy, and self-concept. The participants recognized the need for teachers to use different instructional strategies and to tailor content and educational materials to students' learning styles and academic and affective needs (Gardner, 2011). Participants, in the focus groups shared that they had ideas for engaging the learners but lacked sufficient time during the internship to differentiate instruction and implement their ideas.

Several participants mentioned that strategies such as songs, drawings, and readings should reflect context familiar to the students (González et al., 2005). One participant suggested using "songs to reinforce the English vocabulary that students have learned in the EFL class" and also "materials that include traditions that are familiar to the learners." Other strategies mentioned in the focus groups were to have learners practice speaking in English, work in dyads, focus on tasks to identify key words in reading materials and/or visualize the meaning of words through drawings as well as

front loading new vocabulary prior to lessons and asking students to write sentences. Candidates indicated pairing students or forming small groups was a strategy that worked for them in their internship experience. They shared that "forming groups composed of an equal number of students with a high level of knowledge and students who were struggling "helped the students who were behind in content knowledge created…competition in the group between/among the children." They believed this type of exercise "challenged the students within the group to discover new concepts." Although the candidates explained strategies to support learning at different levels of knowledge and understanding (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994), they emphasized the limited time they had to plan their lessons and the need to challenge students to compete with each other. They stated, "Once I graduate and am teaching in my own classroom, I will make sure that all my students reach desired academic levels" and "I will try to do what I can to challenge all students". The candidates also noted that differentiated strategies were infrequently utilized by their mentor-teachers in their internships, and that this may have been due to the large number of students in each classroom. Comments suggest that the candidates were asked to use instructional strategies recommended by their teacher. Mentors and their choices were limited to those strategies.

The participants noted that as they implemented strategies, it was important to assess the students' progress. Candidates explained the process as "One day I teach vocabulary related to clothing and the next day vocabulary about food; then I assess all the students." They indicated that assessment is dependent on the skill being taught. For instance, "if vocabulary was being evaluated, worksheets would be employed. If speaking skills were assessed, then conversations between students would be used." One participant specified that continuous assessment at the end of each class is helpful; "I ask simple questions about the students' day to assess the learning of the new vocabulary, and the integration of new words with previous knowledge." These steps helped the teacher candidates re-assess the pedagogical strategies that were implemented, proceed with changes to the lesson plan, and know when there was a need to reinforce concepts. A few participants indicated that "It is important to perform a needs assessment of the students' level of knowledge prior to selecting instructional strategies (e.g., visual prompts, aural inputs) to plan lessons accordingly".

## Approaches to engage Students

The candidates expressed that utilizing familiar themes while teaching helps the students acquire new knowledge and recall information (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). They recognized that "Not all teachers are prepared to teach in rural area where academic needs are greater and there are fewer resources." Participants indicated that "Teachers need to be better prepared to teach in the rural areas so they will select material that makes sense to the students." They seemed concerned that not all teachers

used materials that fit the school and community context. For instance, one teacher candidate noted that materials for teaching English did not relate to the students' lives. Although the participants stressed that reading assignments became cumbersome for students when they could not use previous knowledge or experiences to relate to the topic or the vocabulary in the assigned reading passage written in English, scaffolding instruction was only vaguely addressed or identified by the participants (Vygotsky, 1986).

Participants admitted following the curriculum required by their mentor and university supervisor without considering the needs of the students in their internships. They were unanimous in their agreement that the Ecuadorian Secretary of Education determines the school curriculum (Van Damme et al., 2013) and shared that the purpose of a unified curriculum is to provide the same education to all students across the country (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). This provided equity "If a student transfers from one public school to another, the transition is seamless". Although the participants acknowledged the importance of being able to effortlessly transition from one school to another, they indicated that "teachers need to be trained in the country's curricular expectations [and] well-prepared to teach in rural areas if they are to appropriately support the students because transitions are not simple." Several teacher candidates mentioned that lack of time to plan lessons was a challenge. A comment that elicited agreement was "I noticed that I was not reaching some of my students; however, I did not have the time to develop materials to help those students." Their comments provide evidence that the candidates had many questions about planning and delivering instruction that were not answered during their formal training nor during their internships.

## Students with multicultural background

Concerning students from multicultural backgrounds, the participants provided comments demonstrating the enacted curriculum did not focus on preparing them to teach multicultural students (Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011). Comments such as "I was not taught [during my formal preparation before the internship] about multiculturalism; however, in my future classroom I know that I will encounter cultural diversity" demonstrated candidates concerns. It appears that explicit components of Ecuador's diversity are recognized by the government (Constitución Política del Ecuador, 1998) but not acknowledged to be a factor in schooling achievement (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). The candidates mentioned that they know there are different ethnic groups present in Ecuador and that "interactions with other cultures occurs at formal and informal levels." These interactions are reflected in the classroom as students come together in the classroom to learn; thus, it is important to consider how to support

a diverse school population's interactions and learning activities. A couple of participants acknowledged that "interpersonal interactions among students exposed them to other cultures and they learn from each other." Comments acknowledge the diversity in school populations and in the country's population, but there was little evidence of this in the curriculum (Banks, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008). The diversity in the classroom visible to the candidates reflected a consensus that "teachers should make efforts to know their students" so that they are able to "select the best resources." The teacher candidates overwhelmingly agreed on the need to make learning engaging. For instance, several participants indicated that the teacher should "find activities that students like and that make learning enjoyable." In addition, there was a voiced concern that teachers "should be respectful so that students will trust the teacher." The participants' intense focus on the quality of the classroom environment documented their awareness of the need to address and validate students' cultural capital (Freire, 1985) and make learning participatory. They mentioned they had not delved deeply into their students' backgrounds (Hult & Hornberger, 2016; Ramos Pellicia, 2020) and had made the assumption that languages other than Spanish would neither interfere nor contribute to the study of English.

## Parent involvement

Parental involvement and the teacher's role in engaging families was not a priority in the candidates' conversations. Participants commented that this topic did not receive much attention in the teacher preparation program (Nieto, 2018). Moreover, the teacher's role in engaging families was not a priority in the candidates' conversations, as there was an almost complete absence of discussion about parents and other members of the community contributing to the school in ways other than through financial support (Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011). However, four participants explained the importance of parent involvement to address classroom behavioral issues that affect the child's academic achievement. One participant indicated "I observed that parent involvement would have been beneficial in disciplinary challenges at the high school level"; another participant supported the statement by stating, "I believe that parent involvement would have been a good avenue to solve disciplinary issues." Parent involvement was perceived as a factor that participants did not have control over but   was needed to support students' academic success. One participant stated, "Parents do not support students learning another language." The candidates clearly stated the importance of parent participation in children's schooling to support the learning needs of diverse students.

# Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that aspiring teachers are aware of the diverse instructional practices required for effective lesson planning, and they are committed to addressing both the academic and emotional needs of learners (Banks, 2014; Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011; Nieto 2018). Participants shared their perspectives on pedagogical practices that could be implemented in classrooms, including the importance of considering students' existing knowledge when developing teaching materials (Author, 2017, 2016; Hawkins and Norton 2009; Kincheloe 2008). The significance of actively engaging students emerged as a recurring theme, but other areas such as multiculturalism and parental involvement appear to require more focused attention in Ecuador's teacher training programs (Ecuador Immediato, 2016; Cevallos-Estarellas & Bromwell, 2015).

To enhance their preparedness for the classroom, teacher candidates would benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of how to design and implement a systematic approach to lesson planning (Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011; González et al., 2005). Engaging in reflective processes with fellow teachers in dyads or small groups could help improve their ability to identify effective instructional strategies specifically suited to (EFL) classrooms in Ecuador (Bennett, 2019; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; Giroux & Silva, 2010). This reflective approach would provide a research-based foundation for EFL instruction (Serrano et al., 2015).

The absence of evidence demonstrating a system-wide approach to planning EFL classroom instruction is concerning because it supports participants' belief that they are not adequately prepared to design lessons for Ecuador's diverse learners (Van Damme et al. 2013). It is crucial for future teachers to have the self-confidence to take risks, evaluate their teaching methods, and make adjustments based on self-reflection. The educational system in Ecuador should aim to instil in educators a sense of confidence in their acquired knowledge so that they are empowered to experiment and adapt their instruction accordingly (Bucklewe & Fishman, 2011; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020; González et al., 2005).

## Research Limitations

Data gathered in this study cannot be generalized beyond the 28 teacher candidates who volunteered to participate in this research. In order to establish a complete picture of teacher preparation in Ecuador and answer the study questions for the entire country, it will be necessary to conduct similar research in other institutions and also with teacher candidates' representative of the nation's public tertiary institutions. Understanding the tensions within the classroom about pedagogical theories, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques about multicultural education and

candidates' formal instruction would allow higher education institutions to adjust their teacher preparation programs.

## Implications for the Future

Teachers' identities as educators (Fitts et al., 2008) require that they have opportunities to empower themselves and their students. Empowerment could be channelled through self-reflection so teachers would internalize their teaching philosophies and how these are evidenced in their practice in the day-to-day classroom activities. Participants did not share a system-wide approach to EFL guided by questioning, collaboration, exploration, and experimentation with curricular models. Future research might encourage educators to explore ways that programs of teacher preparation and professional development models might better evaluate local contexts and address the multilingual/multicultural nature of Ecuadorian learners. Another thread of future research relates to English educators' teaching loads after the academic reforms. Although the Ministry of Education provides lesson plans, English teachers are teaching more grade levels and it is not clear how time for preparation of educational materials is allocated at local levels.

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# Exploring Instructors' Beliefs and Practices in Promoting Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Writing Classes[1]

## Explorando las creencias y prácticas de los instructores para promover las habilidades de pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura

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# Abstract

The growing requirement for students' robust critical thinking (CT) skills in their academic writing, particularly at the tertiary level, has augmented the attention to equipping students with CT ability. The study, therefore, sought to investigate instructors' beliefs and practices in promoting students' critical thinking (CT) in writing classes. A multiple case study design was employed to address the study objective. Three purposively selected instructors from Wolkite University participated. The data collection method involved classroom observation, interview, and document analysis. The analysis was performed qualitatively using a grounded theory approach- open, axial, and selective coding. The findings indicated that the participants interpreted CT as students' abilities to use appropriate language and logically argue in their writing. They explained some strategies used to promote students' CT skills. These included providing an explicit introduction to CT, incorporating CT into the evaluation system, scaffolding, and giving meaningful topics and adequate opportunities for students to practice writing. Writing activities such as argumentative, summary and cause-effect types were considered to promote students' CT in writing classes. The study categorized and reported factors that interfered with instructors' beliefs and practices as student-related, instructor-related, and situation-specific factors. The findings contribute relevant insights into the English language teaching sphere.

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, instructors' beliefs, instructors' practices, students' critical thinking, writing skills

# Resumen

La creciente necesidad de que los estudiantes tengan sólidas habilidades de pensamiento crítico (CT) en su escritura académica, particularmente en el nivel terciario, ha aumentado la atención para equipar a los estudiantes con habilidades CT. Por lo tanto, el estudio buscó investigar las creencias y prácticas de los profesores para promover el pensamiento crítico (CT) de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura. Se empleó un diseño de estudio de casos múltiples para abordar el objetivo del estudio. Participaron tres instructores intencionalmente seleccionados de la Universidad Wolkite. El método de recolección de datos implicó observación en el aula, entrevista y análisis de documentos. El análisis se realizó cualitativamente utilizando un enfoque de teoría fundamentada: codificación abierta, axial y selectiva. Los hallazgos indicaron que los participantes interpretaron la PC como la capacidad de los estudiantes para usar un lenguaje apropiado y argumentar lógicamente en sus escritos. Explicaron algunas estrategias utilizadas para promover las habilidades CT de los estudiantes. Estas incluyeron proporcionar una introducción explícita a la CT, incorporar la CT en el sistema de evaluación, crear andamios y brindar temas significativos y oportunidades adecuadas para que los estudiantes practiquen la escritura. Se consideraron actividades de escritura de tipo argumentativo, resumido y causa-efecto para promover la PC de los estudiantes en las clases de escritura. El estudio categorizó e informó los factores que interferían con las creencias y prácticas de los instructores como factores relacionados con los estudiantes, relacionados con los instructores y específicos de la situación. Los hallazgos aportan conocimientos relevantes sobre el ámbito de la enseñanza del idioma inglés.

*Palabras claves:* Pensamiento crítico, creencias de los profesores, prácticas de los profesores, pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes, habilidades de escritura.

# Resumo

A crescente necessidade de habilidades robustas de pensamento crítico (PC) dos alunos em sua escrita acadêmica, especialmente no nível superior, tem aumentado a atenção para capacitar os alunos com habilidades de PC. O estudo buscou investigar, portanto, as crenças e práticas dos instrutores na promoção do pensamento crítico (PC) dos alunos em aulas de escrita. Foi empregado um design de estudo de caso múltiplo para abordar o objetivo do estudo. Três instrutores selecionados propositadamente da Universidade de Wolkite participaram. O método de coleta de dados envolveu observação de sala de aula, entrevista e análise de documentos. A análise foi realizada qualitativamente usando uma abordagem de teoria fundamentada - codificação aberta, axial e seletiva. Os resultados indicaram que os participantes interpretaram o PC como as habilidades dos alunos de usar linguagem apropriada e argumentar logicamente em sua escrita. Eles explicaram algumas estratégias usadas para promover as habilidades de PC dos alunos. Estas incluíram fornecer uma introdução explícita ao PC, incorporar o PC no sistema de avaliação, andamento gradual e oferecer **tópicos significativos e oportunidades** adequadas para os alunos praticarem a escrita. Atividades de escrita, como tipos argumentativos, sumário e causa-efeito, foram consideradas para promover o PC dos alunos em aulas de escrita. O estudo categorizou e relatou fatores que interferiram nas crenças e práticas dos instrutores como relacionados aos alunos, aos instrutores e a situações específicas. Os resultados contribuem com insights relevantes para a esfera do ensino da língua inglesa.

*Palavras-chave:* Pensamento crítico, crenças dos instrutores, práticas dos instrutores, pensamento crítico dos alunos, habilidades de escrita.

# Introduction

P roducing learners equipped with CT ability and who can function in this ever-changing and complex world evolved into an eminent concern of numerous scholars (e.g., Buskist & Irons, 2008; Paul & Elder, 2002; Schafersman, 1991; Vallis, 2010). Learners, who have the ability to question perspectives, recognize alternative points of view, make decisions/judgments, and solve problems, are demanded in today's workforce. The standards in the market require learners to handle the proliferation of information and to carefully weigh available evidence (Buskist & Irons, 2008; Halpern, 2003). Çavdar and Doe (2012) posited that critical thinkers have the ability to make better decisions by analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing existing information on a particular issue. The efficient application of CT ability has, therefore, become a foundation for competently undertaking responsibilities in the contemporary world.

Regardless of its relevance, the interpretation of CT is elusive. Scholars in different disciplines attempted to define it. For instance, in the discipline of philosophy, Facione (1990) described CT as a "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as an explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or conceptual considerations upon which that judgment is based" (p. 3). Facione links CT with the ability to make a judgment by operating the specific CT components. In the context of writing skill, Dong (2015) defined CT as "a mindful application of a structured mode of thinking which aims to improve the quality of thinking to achieve intellectual standards of excellence in L2 written communication" (p. 25). CT is depicted as the ability to exhibit refined thinking in writing.

Despite variations in defining CT, scholars agree on the intimate relationship between CT and writing. According to Paul and Elder (2002), "disciplined writing requires disciplined thinking; disciplined thinking is achieved through disciplined writing" (p. 376). This view echoes the demonstration of CT through writing and the relevance of CT to composing a substantiated text that meets the intended purpose. Advocating writing as a mechanism to stimulate CT, researchers (e.g., Bouanani, 2015; Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007) argued that learners reflect CT in applying knowledge of their course content. Writing reflects thinking. The recursive and reflective nature of writing assists learners' utilization of CT elements (Bouanani, 2015). Paul and Elder (2006), in this respect, expounded that "in writing, they [students] are able to clearly and accurately analyze and evaluate ideas in texts and in their own thinking" (p. 5).

The impact of CT in enhancing students' CT ability and thereby writing performance is explicated by various researchers (e.g., Dong, 2015; Lin, 2014; Moghaddam & Malekzadeh, 2011; Zhao et al., 2016). Academic writing is beyond a

collection of words, linguistic structures, and paragraphs. Nejmaoui (2019) asserted that effective communication of meaning in writing cannot be attained by haphazardly repeating language. CT is assumed to enable writers to compose texts systematically by retaining the purpose. Composing a text for the intended purpose requires writers to develop plausible reasoning, evidence, and conclusion that ultimately demands CT ability. For instance, generating and inspecting the relevance of the information, and coordinating ideas in a meaningful and reasonable way mainly involve the application of CT. In other words, CT guides writers to "think through a given idea." (Vallis, 2010, p. 5).

Because of the significant role of CT, intellectuals (e.g., Dong, 2015; Dwee et al., 2016; Lin, 2014) advocate the necessity of promoting students' CT in the educational sphere. Khatib et al. (2012) argued that "it is a moral right for learners to learn how to think critically" (p. 34). The promotion of students' CT is, however, influenced by instructors' classroom decisions and beliefs about CT. Instructors' classroom practices and beliefs about students' CT and writing abilities determine the learning condition. Several scholars (Borg, 2003; Breen et al., 2001; Pajares, 1992) indicated the influence of instructors' beliefs on their classroom practices. Instructors' beliefs, which are tacitly impacted by their prior learning experience, educational training, and teaching experience, dictate their actions in the actual context. As Gemechis (2020) explained, instructors' beliefs, which are mainly reflected through their classroom practices, "are a critical foundation for students to receive the knowledge and skills that they need to fulfill their potential" (p.59).

Instructors' classroom practices are assumed to accord with the principles in the educational curriculums in Ethiopia. Promoting students' CT has become one of the pertinent areas in GTP 2010/15 (MoE, 2011). The educational curriculums throughout primary up to university advocate the promotion of students' CT ability using a learner-centered approach (MoE, 2009, 2013, 2018). Correspondingly, instructors' attempt to promote students' CT is emphasized in the Higher Diploma Program (HDP) - in-service training provided to instructors in Ethiopian universities (MoE, 2011). They are supposed to facilitate learning, encourage independent learning, create conducive writing classrooms, and employ meaningful tasks (MoE, 2011, 2013). There exists an expectation that the teaching-learning process embraces both what to think (content knowledge) and how to think (thinking critically) aspects (Crawford et al., 2005; Schafersman, 1991).

Nonetheless, our knowledge about university instructors' beliefs and practices of promoting students' CT in writing classes is limited. For example, Meng (2016) studied the perspectives of primary school EFL teachers about the significance of incorporating CT into the curriculum. The study emphasized reading skills in connection with CT so that writing skill was not the concern. Petek and Bedir's (2015) study, on the other hand, aimed at assessing pre-service and in-service English teachers' perception of

CT and its integration into language education. Regardless of the significance of the study in the context of ELT, the participants' conceptualization of CT in the context of ELT was not precisely indicated. Besides, the strategies that the participants used to reinforce students' CT in the classrooms were neglected. Similarly, Tuzlukova et al.'s (2017) study explored English language teachers' beliefs about CT and the association between CT and language teaching methods. Like the studies above, the connection between CT and writing skills received no particular attention. In addition, the study neglected how the teachers' professed beliefs were exhibited in classroom practices.

The aforementioned gaps, therefore, instigated the authors to explore the beliefs and practices of instructors in promoting students' CT in the context of writing classes at the university level. The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are instructors' beliefs about promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

2. How are instructors' stated beliefs reflected in their practices in promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

3. What factors influence instructors' practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes?

## Literature Review

### Critical Thinking and its Elements

Critical thinking (CT) has become the principal issue in different disciplines (Dong, 2015). The philosophical dimension explains the peculiarities or qualities of a critical thinker (Lai, 2011). For instance, Paul and Elder (2006) interpreted CT as "the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it" (p. 4). For Paul and Elder, CT is about refining thinking by employing particular standards used to scrutinize reasoning. The cognitive psychologists (e.g., Sternberg, 1986), however, criticized the philosophical dimension for its focus on 'formal logical systems' that is incongruent with classroom requirements. Fahim and Mirzaii (2014) argued that the philosophical approach "merely focusing on hypothesized competence viewed in a vacuum, loses sight of real-life performance (p. 5)". Cognitive psychologists describe the actual thinking process. Sternberg (1986) explained CT as "the mental processes, strategies, and representations people use to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts" (p.3). The absence of a clear description of the 'mental strategies', however, makes the interpretation ambiguous and challenging to apply in an educational setting. Educationists adapt definitions either from the philosophy, or cognitive psychology disciplines. The interpretation of CT, thus, embraces both

competence and performance orientations (Sternberg, 1986). The use of different expressions to define CT might occur following scholars' attempts to subsume CT in their respective disciplines. This variation, however, cannot imply the existence of significant conceptual differences among intellectuals.

CT embraces both cognitive skills and dispositions. According to Facione (1990), CT involves six cognitive skills: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (p.7). Paul and Elder's (2002) category incorporates elements of thought and intellectual standards. Elements of thought represent a related concept with what different scholars mention as 'CT skills'. Paul and Elder attempted to make CT more tangible and susceptible to measurement through the 'Intellectual Standards'. For this reason, most researchers (e.g., Dong, 2015; Wang, 2017) indicated the suitability of Paul and Elder's model to adapt in the EFL context. In the discipline of education, researchers (e.g., Baez, 2004; Dong, 2015) commonly mention Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. The higher-order levels in the taxonomy- analysis, synthesis, and evaluation- are claimed to represent the demonstration of CT in an educational setting (Wang, 2017). Despite variations in the proposed taxonomies, the skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation appear across the models.

Possessing CT skills fails to guarantee the disposition to apply them and vice versa (Facione, 2000; Jones et al., 1995). Learners are expected to have the disposition to implement the skills in appropriate circumstances (Qing, 2013). According to Paul and Elder (2002), CT dispositions incorporate intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual sense of justice, intellectual perseverance, intellectual fair-mindedness, intellectual confidence in reason, intellectual courage, intellectual empathy, and intellectual autonomy (p. 39). Regardless of its relevance, the disposition aspect has failed to obtain adequate recognition in educational settings, particularly in the EFL context. For instance, the disposition aspect gained little weight in studies (e.g., Daud, 2012; Dong, 2015; Lin, 2014) that focused on students' CT and English language learning. The lack of instructional strategies to reinforce students' CT dispositions and the inadequate awareness about the components might have caused the problem.

## CT Promoting Strategies in Writing Classes

According to Wilson's (2019) explanation, a language class that is "interactive, vibrant, authentic, explicit and scaffolded" (p. 14) facilitates the promotion of students' CT. A wide array of teaching strategies exist to promote students' CT. These included teacher modeling, collaborative learning, questioning, reading, and writing assignments. The instructors' modeling of the demonstration of CT impacts students' implementation of CT, especially the disposition aspect of CT (Abrami et al., 2008; Buskist & Irons, 2008). Teachers model the demonstration of CT by recognizing biases as well as clarifying their viewpoints (Hofreiter, 2005). Students, thus, become flexible

in dealing with alternative ideas, detecting personal bias, and developing the habit of questioning views when conveying ideas in writing (Zhao et al., 2016).

Collaborative learning, which entails group discussion, dialogue, peer evaluation/ review, and group work, supports the promotion of students' CT in writing classes (Buranapatana, 2006; Dwee et al., 2016; Fahim & Mirzaii, 2014). Osborne et al. (2009) argued that learners execute CT by communicating ideas, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, and generating and scrutinizing varied perspectives in collaboration. They become conscious of the potential mental strategies by observing others demonstrate CT components (Buranapatana, 2006; Zhao et al., 2016). Likewise, Daud (2012) stated that learners become open-minded through the process of giving and receiving comments or suggestions of optional ideas from their peers. Collaboration, therefore, assists students in accomplishing complex tasks that demand advanced mental processing and reasoning skills.

In addition, questioning has become a prominent strategy to promote students' CT (Alfares, 2014; Buranapatana, 2006; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). As Fahim and Khatib (2013) explained, "it is the duty of the teacher to implicitly ask students to attend to strategies of CT and to evaluate each reasoning and argument on a multi-dimensional level before accepting it as correct" (p.82). Asking questions during lecturing compels students to analyze and apply the learned contents in different situations (Schafersman, 1991). In describing CT-triggering questions, Beyer (2001a, cited in Buranapatana, 2006) stated the relevance of questions that "call for sustained efforts to reason and to evaluate reasoning" (p.89). These questions demand students to "clarify statements, define terms, and judge the relevance, accuracy, and nature of statements" (p.89).

Furthermore, students' CT can be better reinforced by integrating reading and writing skills (Dong, 2015; Mehta & Al-mahrouqi, 2015). Paul and Elder (2008, cited in Mehta & Al-mahrouqi, 2015) stated that "writing which is not based on critical reading might well be merely personal and exist without either context or wider purpose" (p. 40). In this type of writing, prejudices, biases, myths, and stereotypes become dominant. Therefore, activities that demand analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing reasoning/ argument, explaining understanding and implied meaning in a text, and asking and responding to questions stimulate students' CT in writing (Case, 2004; Cottrell, 2005; Fahim & Eslamdoost, 2014). Generally, researchers (e.g., Case, 2004; Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Mangena, 2003; Mulnix & Mulnix, 2010) suggested different types of writing tasks. These included argumentative, narrative, and opinion writing; note-taking, summary, and reflective writing as well as seminar papers.

## Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Promoting Students' CT in Language Learning Class

Examining teachers' beliefs is a daunting task due to different conceptualizations of the term. For example, Haney et al. (2003) interpreted beliefs as "one's convictions, philosophy, tents, or opinions about teaching and learning" (p. 367). In a more specific way, Pajares (1992) characterized beliefs as "teachers' attitudes about education-about schooling, teaching, learning, and students" (p. 316). Pajares asserted that every teacher holds beliefs about the profession, the students, the subject matter, and the teachers' roles and responsibilities. In the present study, beliefs refer to a complex set of theories, assumptions, and perspectives instructors hold about the teaching, learning, and curricula related to writing and the promotion of students' CT in writing instruction.

In this respect, the findings of different studies explicated teacher respondents' beliefs about the interpretation of CT, the nature of CT-promoting activities, and teaching strategies. For example, in Meng's (2016) study, CT was depicted as the ability to produce novel ideas, develop a point of view, solve problems, and make plausible decisions through 'analyzing', 'reasoning', 'processing information' and 'questioning' (p. 178). The respondents' limited understanding of the concept of CT was mentioned as a recurring issue in the studies. In addition, respondents in several studies (e.g., Hasni et al., 2018; Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova, 2020; Tuzlukova et al., 2017) illustrated varied CT- promoting activities. These were argumentative writing, reflective writing, reporting, blog writing, paraphrasing, and summarizing.  Studies (Gregory, 2011; Kanik, 2010; Meng, 2016) further indicated various CT-promoting teaching strategies. These included explicit teaching of CT elements, assessment of CT, inductive approach, inquiry, self-reflection, questioning, group and whole class discussion, and modeling.

The degree of consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices is, however, determined by contextual factors (Borg, 2003; Tsui, 2011). Contextual factors that impede the promotion of students' CT in writing classes are related to students, teachers, and situations. Students' achievement-oriented perception and lack of interest are among the student-related factors. Hofreiter (2005) argued that students who prioritize scoring good grades have less determination to think critically. These students instead prefer memorizing facts, responding to close-ended questions, and struggling to secure their marks (Alwine, 2007; Gregory, 2011; Reynolds, 2016). Besides, students avoid thinking critically about content that they perceived as irrelevant, and they become passive if their interests/needs are not addressed (Buskist & Irons, 2008; Gregory, 2011).

Additionally, teachers' insufficient understanding of CT, and CT- promoting strategies deter their efficacy in explicitly promoting students' CT (Dwee et al., 2016). In this regard, Alwine (2007) clarified doubts concerning instructors' potential to teach CT without a sufficient understanding of CT aspects. The absence of pre-service and

in-service methodological training concerning CT has contributed to the teachers' limited awareness of CT (Reynolds, 2016; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Likewise, Buskist and Irons (2008) associated teachers' abstinence from promoting CT with the teachers' uncertainty about the assessment mechanisms of CT in students' work. Furthermore, situational factors such as time constraints and large class sizes are explained to be hindering factors. Shortage of time obliges teachers to be indecisive about whether to focus on content coverage or encourage depth of understanding and CT (Saleh, 2019).

# Method

## Research Design

A multiple case study design was adopted. The design helps to extensively investigate the promotion of students' CT in writing classes from the perspective of multiple instructors to gain varied meanings (Yin, 2003). Examining the similarities as well as differences among the cases helped the authors to detect complex and unique insights regarding the issue in the study. Multiple case study aims at developing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on its natural setting (Yin, 2014, 2018). This nature of the case study supported the investigation of contextual factors that affect instructors' practices.

## Participants

The study was carried out at Wolkite University- one of the third-generation public universities in Ethiopia. Yin (2018) asserted that participant selection in a multiple case study is primarily determined by the potential to generate a thorough understanding of a phenomenon instead of population representativeness. Three instructors were, therefore, purposively selected among the 30 instructors in the Department of English Language and Literature. They were selected in light of their background training, the course they offer, and their teaching experience. Instructors, who were trained in ELT (English Language Teaching), and teach the Communicative English Language Skills II course, participated in the study. These instructors were believed to provide better data due to their familiarity with the issue of the present study. In addition, the study involved instructors based on the length of their teaching experience categorized into three ranges (< 5 years, 5-10 years, and > 10 years). The target instructors' involvement in the study was, however, determined by their willingness and accessibility. The authors guaranteed the instructors the anonymity of the information they would provide.

**Table 1.** Description of the participants

| Instructor Code | Gender | Qualification | Specialization | Teaching experience (in years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IA | M | MA | ELT | 5 |
| IB | M | PhD candidate | ELT | 10 |
| IC | M | MA | ELT | 14 |

As depicted in Table 1, the authors used instructor code to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Two instructors were MA graduates in ELT, while the other was a PhD candidate in ELT. Their teaching experience varies from 5 to 14 years.

## Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included classroom observation, interviews, and document analysis. The classroom observation data aimed at addressing the second research question. A semi-structured observation protocol as well as continuous field notes served to carry out the observation. The observation checklist was designed based on insights generated from literature (e.g., Choy & Cheah, 2009; Meng, 2016; Paul & Elder, 2002; Mesfin, 2013; Meseret, 2012). The reliability of the observation data was maintained through data triangulation, frequent observation, and note-taking. The validity was ensured by receiving comments on the observation guide, operationalizing the CT indicators, and employing audio records. Adopting a non-participant observation approach, the first author carried out the observation with a support of a voice recorder. A total of nine writing sessions were observed from November 1, 2021, through December 17, 2021. Each of the participants was observed three times.

The interview was used to understand the instructors' unobservable meaning related to the research questions. Three different types of interviews were carried out: 'pre-observation interviews', 'stimulated recall', and the 'main interview'. The pre-observation and stimulated recall interviews accompanied the classroom observations. The pre-observation interview preceded each observation session to obtain an explanation of the instructors' plan as a benchmark to explain their actual practice. The stimulated recall interviews helped to detect the participants' rationalization of their practices. They elucidated their rationale for specific classroom decisions after they listened to the selected segments in the audio record. 'The main interview' was conducted after culminating all the observation sessions to explore the participants' general beliefs concerning CT and the promotion of CT in writing classes. For this interview, a semi-structured interview guide with 11 items related to CT and writing skills was prepared based on previous empirical studies (e.g., McIntyre, 2011; Paul et

al., 1997; Rademaekers, 2018; Stapleton, 2011). The main interview took an average of 1:10 hours. A digital voice recorder was employed throughout all the interview sessions. The reliability of the interview data was ensured by applying the same interview items across different participants (Cohen et al., 2000). Besides, comments were sought from the advisor, a panel of experts, and the respondents to maintain the validity.

Furthermore, the authors used document analysis to gain detailed information that strengthens data generated through observation and interviews. This method was particularly relevant to address the second research question thoroughly. The Communicative English Skills II course incorporated several writing activities. Students are required to write different types of paragraphs and an essay. Instructors who deliver the course give students activities mainly selected from the course material. The document analysis, therefore, focused on analyzing the quality of the writing activities the instructors assigned to students, especially during the observed sessions. For this purpose, a guiding framework that incorporated eleven items was used. The guide was designed based on ideas generated from the literature (e.g., Alfares, 2014; Wahab, 2013). The validity of the tool was ensured based on comments received from the advisor, and three experts.

## Data Collection Process and Analysis

The data collection took two months starting from November 1, 2021, through December 24, 2021. The classroom observations were performed accompanied by the document analysis as well as the pre-observation and stimulated recall interviews. The main interview was conducted with each participant after completing the observation sessions on December 17, 2021. A memo that embraced informal discussions and personal reflections/perspectives complemented the overall data collection process.

The data analysis in a multiple-case study involves single-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009). The authors analyzed each case thoroughly and performed a cross-case analysis to address the research questions. The qualitative data analysis method was manipulated to treat the data. The data analysis involved three phases of coding: open, axial/analytical, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam, 2009). A constant comparative method that included a continuous comparison and contrast of categories, ideas, or concepts within and across the cases was performed during the data generation and coding process (Charmaz, 2006). The coding was processed using NVivo 10 software. The participants received the final version of the data analysis, and verbatim transcriptions of the observations and the interviews for their validation.

# Results

## What are instructors' beliefs about promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

The instructors' beliefs were accessed through interviews. They were asked about their interpretation of CT and its elements, CT-promoting strategies, activities, and feedback.

## Interpretation of CT and the elements

There was a shared understanding between IA and IC concerning the interpretation of CT. They described CT as the ability to understand the way to convey information using the appropriate language in writing (see Table 2). IA highlighted:

CT might be related to the information students have in their minds and the way they express it using the grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics they know. It is the ability they use to just remember and brainstorm or jot down the information that they have in their mind at the first stage [Stimulated Recall Interview 1 (SRI1)].

Differently, IB viewed CT in terms of the ability to express ideas convincingly and logically in writing. IB emphasized the quality of the idea that is communicated to the reader. As shown in Table 2, IB and IC held different perspectives concerning the components of CT. For example, in IB's view, CT embraces Knowing, understanding, transferring, making a conclusion, inferring, and open-mindedness.

*Table 2.* Overview of Instructors' Beliefs about CT Promotion

| Core Themes | Explanation | Cases | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **IA** | **IB** | **IC** |
| CT Interpretation | The ability to evaluate, and have multiple understandings concerning how to use the language form in writing. | x | | x |
| | The ability to express ideas logically and convincingly. | | x | |
| CT elements | Knowing, understanding, transferring, concluding, inferring, and open-mindedness | | x | |
| | Problem-solving, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, fairness, and reasoning | | | x |
| CT-promoting Instructional Mechanisms | Sufficient chance to write | x | x | x |
| | Meaningful topic | x | | x |
| | Pair or group work | x | x | x |
| | CT-oriented evaluation system | | x | |
| | Assessing meaning and structure | | x | |
| | Explicit CT introduction | | x | |
| | Scaffolding and follow up | x | | x |
| CT-promoting writing activities | Argumentative writing | x | | |
| | Cause-effect type of writing | | | x |
| | Summary writing | x | | x |
| | Logical arrangement of sentences | | | x |
| CT-promoting feedback provision | Peer feedback | x | x | |
| | Instructor feedback | | | x |

## CT promoting Instructional Mechanisms

The participants elucidated various CT-promoting mechanisms in writing class (see Table 2). All the participants believed that students demonstrate CT when they obtain the chance to write more frequently instead of solely receiving input about writing skills. IA claimed that the authenticity of the topic transforms students' superficial understanding and description of the issue into higher-level thinking. Similarly, IC expounded on the possibility to promote CT in writing by assigning a variety of writing activities that are related to students' backgrounds, knowledge, and experience. Besides, IA elucidated the contribution of working in groups in minimizing students' anxiety and developing multiple perspectives. IC and IA denoted the possibility that lower achievers elevate their CT ability when working cooperatively with high achievers. IA stated that:

When students write a given essay, the way one keeps the unity of the text is quite different from that of the other. Then, while they share it, they critically think about how to improve, how to write, and how to forward their issue or information [Main interview (M int.)].

Unlike the others, IB elucidated the relevance of CT oriented evaluation system, explicit CT introduction, assessing meaning and structure, and imposing higher expectations on students. Apart from explicitly evaluating the manifestation of students' CT in writing, he indicated the possibility of implicitly promoting CT by seeking students to construct both 'grammatically' and 'functionally' correct sentences. IB illuminated the necessity of training students about the strategies to apply CT. He explained that:

The students can be taught or familiarized with the strategies and techniques that may help them to implement the elements of CT whenever they are writing. Once they know the strategies or the techniques, I think it could be easy for them to employ them whenever they are writing [M int.].

He also argued that students exercise to think critically when teachers consider students' CT ability as a requirement. He said that "We have to tell our students that as a university student, they are required to be critical or showing our expectation […] when the expectation of the teacher is high, the students may attempt to be that level" [M int.]. Additionally, IA and IC advocated instructors' role in scaffolding and follow-up. For example, IA asserted that instructors are responsible for designing and furnishing a path that students walk through. He highlighted that "the way they [students] walk is up to them, but my duty is only building the bridge […] so, I tell students how to reason out for a given issue or problem. I lead them, but the way they write what they have in their mind is up to them" [M int.].

## CT Promoting Writing Activities

The participants explained that CT underlies any writing process, though the nature of some writing activities determines the level of CT the writer has to instill. As depicted in Table 2, IA believed that an argumentative type of writing enables students to be reasonable, to engage in an 'evaluative kind of work', to identify the appropriate expression, and to solve a problem. IA and IC claimed that students demonstrate CT skills in cause-effect and summary writing. IC argued that "we also encourage students to make a summary. So they analyze a text and summarize a long text….We are not only teaching writing skills rather we are giving a chance for students to think critically about different subject areas or core courses" [M int.]. Moreover, IC signified the involvement of reasoning as students decide to sequence ideas in activities that demand logical arrangement of concepts.

## CT Promoting feedback Provision

Peer feedback and instructor feedback have gained weight compared to self-reflection. According to the participants' view, the criteria that they introduce would implicitly dictate the students to do self-reflection. They believed that students exercise the skill of 'evaluation' when performing peer feedback and self-reflection. The participants, however, doubted the effectiveness of peer feedback compared to instructor feedback. IA argued that students' writing competence determines their ability to provide comments on others' texts. Likewise, IB contended that most of the students' feedback on their colleagues' written work is always positive. IB and IC considered instructor feedback as a mechanism for identifying the student's current status, motivating negligent students, and appreciating hardworking students.

The content of the feedback determines the students' opportunity to exercise CT in their writing. As the instructors stated, their criteria incorporated the structure of a paragraph (topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentence), unity, coherence, completeness, sentence clarity, reasoning, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. IB said that "most of the time whenever coherence is discussed, we often discuss the connectives or the linking words. But to write a coherent paragraph or essay, one needs to think critically" [SRI1]. He stated the possibility of sustaining the unity and coherence of a written text through thinking critically.

## How are instructors' stated beliefs reflected in their practices in promoting students' CT skills in writing classes?

The instructors' classroom practices were categorized under four themes: classroom interaction, instructional mechanism, the nature of writing activities, and the system of feedback provision. Each theme was elaborated with key indicators and a description of the indicators (see Table 3). The 'description' thoroughly portrays the feature of the key indicators based on the observation data. The implementation frequency designates the frequency at which the instructors implemented a particular strategy. It was counted in light of the number of classroom observations conducted with each participant.

*Table 3.* A Description of Instructors' Practices

| Classroom Practices | Key Indicators | Description | Implementation Frequency | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | IA | IB | IC |
| Classroom Interaction | Student-student Interaction | Collaboration, confirmation, clarification, commenting, generating ideas | 3× | 3× | 3× |
| | Instructor-student Interaction | Complementing, examining knowledge, monitoring attention, responding to questions, motivating, stimulating thinking, prompting elaboration | 3× | 3× | 3× |
| Instructional Mechanism | Implementing process approach | Brainstorming, drafting, receiving feedback, writing the final draft | 3× | 3× | 3× |
| | Providing input | Steps of the writing process, types of paragraphs, cohesive devices, the structure of a paragraph and an essay | 3× | 3× | 3× |
| | reading text | Sample for the structure of a paragraph, cohesive devise implementation | - | once | once |
| | Assigning extra activity | Essay writing outside class | - | once | - |
| | Facilitating | Sharing responsibilities, explaining, providing examples, suggesting terms or expressions, guiding, encouraging | 3× | 3× | 3× |
| The nature of writing activities | Narrative paragraph writing | Personal experience of problem-solving | once | - | once |
| | Reflective paragraph writing | Lessons learned from Dr. Aklilu | - | once | once |
| | Argumentative paragraph writing | Banning chat chewing, refuting or supporting the author's point of view, using traditional medicine | once | once | once |
| | problem solution paragraph writing | global warming problems and solutions | once | - | once |
| | Informative paragraph writing | Herbal medicine advantages and disadvantages | - | - | once |
| | Compare-contrast paragraph writing | Traditional versus modern medicine | - | once | - |
| | Informative essay writing | University life challenges | - | once | - |

| | Instructor feedback | Content and language focus | 3× | 3× | 3× |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The nature of feedback provision | Self-reflection | Content and language focus | 3× | 3× | 2× |
| | Peer feedback | Content and language focus | 2× | 3× | - |

Classroom interaction was the most prevalent occurrence in all the participants' classes (see Table 3). There was instructor-student interaction throughout the observed sessions. This interaction concentrated on complementing and questioning students to stimulate their thinking, examine their knowledge and monitor their attention. Most of the instructors' questions during the lecture sessions sought a predetermined answer that mainly required lower-order thinking instead of CT. The student-student interactions mainly occurred when writing collaboratively, peer commenting, and idea generation. For example, during the third observation session, IA instructed students to develop a paragraph individually and then produce a text collaboratively by combining selected ideas from their respective texts. This instance exposed students to analyze, evaluate and identify points through meaningfully interacting with peers. In IB's and IC's classes, students were allowed to share experiences and generate ideas at the prewriting stage.

The finding further revealed instructors' implementation of diverse instructional mechanisms such as process approach, input delivery, assigning a home-take writing activity, and facilitating. The instructors persistently followed up and encouraged students to do the activities using the process approach. Nonetheless, only a few students in the three sections continued writing after receiving feedback on their drafts. According to the observation, the participants provided inputs on different core issues about paragraph and essay writing (see Table 3). IB and IC accompanied the input delivery with sample reading texts. However, at the pre-writing stage, none of the instructors assigned time for students to read the passages that complemented the writing activities in the course material. Yet, few students in IB's and IC's classes were reading the passages before writing. The participants strived to compensate for this gap by reminding students of relevant information, giving examples and clues, and asking for elaboration. Among the others, IB extended students' writing practice by assigning a home take writing activity.

As shown in Table 3, students accomplished several writing activities that requires their CT ability. The activities demanded students to include examples and reasons and recognize the opposite view as well as incorporate ideas other than their mere

opinion. For instance, IC informed the students to use sufficient reasons and examples when writing a paragraph about their agreement and disagreement with the author's view. Similarly, harmonizing with his belief about CT elements, IB encouraged the students to consider opposing perspectives while writing an argumentative paragraph about traditional medicine. IA contrarily directed students to focus on their point of argument instead of recognizing the opposite side when writing a paragraph on prohibiting the practice of chewing chat. The students in IB's and IC's classes had more exposure to different writing activities since they did more than one writing activity in a two hours session. Moreover, students had to analyze, synthesize and evaluate concepts in passages when doing some of the paragraph writing activities. The instructors were, however, reluctant to encourage students to read the passages before doing the writing activities.

Moreover, students obtained comments on their drafts through instructor feedback, self-reflection, and peer feedback. IA's and IC's criteria focused on grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, coherence, and unity. IC emphasized students' reasoning, particularly in the second observation session. IB's criteria focused on the inclusion of opposite perspectives, and reasons. Students were not given a separate time for self-reflection. The instructors instead informed these criteria to the students and instructed them to evaluate their draft before peer feedback or instructor comment. Besides, the participants gave feedback to students individually and to the overall class at the end of each session. Peer feedback was the preferable strategy mainly employed by IA and IB. For example, during the third observation day, IA initiated discussions with the peers concerning the comments and learn from their mistakes.

## What factors influence instructors' practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes?

According to the participants' explanation, the factors that impede the practice of promoting students' CT in writing classes are student-related, instructor-related, and situational factors. The student-related factors include inadequate understanding of the basic elements of writing and the absence of learners' self-autonomy. The participants contemplated good writing competence as a requisite to concentrate on students' CT. For example, IB said that "We have to teach and we have to remind our students to be critical whenever they are writing. My doubt is whether it is possible to teach or focus on CT on students who even lack the basic skills…how can I teach CT to students who start sentences with a small letter?" [M int.]. Similarly, IC explained the difficulty of promoting CT to students who cannot express ideas meaningfully. Moreover, the participants indicated students' negligence of their responsibility as an obstacle. IB clarified the students' apathy to practicing writing and bringing the necessary materials when they attend classes. He was, therefore, convinced about the unfeasibility of high expectations concerning promoting students' CT in writing classes.

In addition, the instructors mentioned aggressiveness and poor commitment as instructor-related factors that affect the promotion of students' CT. They indicated the prevalence of instructors who provide discouraging criticisms of students' errors, yet avoid compliments on the students' better attempts. IA disclosed that "most of the instructors in the university, including the instructors in my department, are aggressive on students […] the instructor has to appreciate them for their writing. He/she should give them constructive feedback on the error they have made while writing" [M int.]. In the participants' view, this factor presses students to focus on avoiding mistakes instead of making their ideas clear, and they get compelled to conform to what others believe. Moreover, the participants mentioned instructors' sporadic decrease in commitment to teaching. IB argued that instructors with low commitment are no longer interested in the teaching profession, so they are aloof to following up on how students critically express their points when writing. Instructors with such behavior instead prefer to deliver content that they are familiar with for years.

The instructors, furthermore, stated other situational factors related to classroom size, time constraints, and material preparation. They indicated the unfeasibility of asking students the 'how' and 'why' questions due to large class sizes, and time constraints. IA explained that "the number of students available within a classroom never pave the way to […] evaluate the mistake or to check whether they are applying CT or not [.…] how can I see all those 60 students' activity within an hour?..." [M int.]. The participants clarified their struggle to thoroughly check what students did and give students extra time for further practice to enable them to improve their mistakes due to time limitations.

Moreover, the participants reflected contradictory views regarding the teaching material [communicative English skills II course module]. IB criticized the module for a dearth of diverse situations in the writing activities and for the absence of an explicit introduction to CT. He said that "I do not know whether it is implicitly mentioned there or not. But if you ask me my understanding, it says nothing about CT. So, I cannot say it helps students to develop their CT" [M int.]. Conversely, IC argued that the module provided students with broader experiences and comprehensible themes that trigger students' CT ability. Opposing IC's view, IA complained about the module for including unfamiliar issues to students. He explained that "Even the issues the module comprised are just directly related to that of the Western country. How could I enforce students who came from villages to write about what they did not know?" (M int.). Despite this contradiction, the instructors agree that the material needs additional revision.

## Discussion

The participants interpreted CT as the ability to express ideas convincingly or logically and as a strategy to manipulate the appropriate form of language when writing. These definitions imply the purpose the participants attached to CT, yet they confined them to limited expressions. Several studies (e.g., Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016; Stapleton, 2011) reported the unclear and insufficient definition of CT by respondents. Marijic and Romfelt (2016) associated this gap with the teachers' inadequate training concerning CT. The finding, to some extent, is consistent with some studies (e.g., Beyer, 1984; Chaffee, 2012; Ghaemi & Mirsaeed, 2017; Meng, 2016). These studies described CT as the mental ability to incorporate evidence and reason to convey ideas logically. Among the CT components that the participants illustrated, 'analysis', 'synthesis', and 'evaluation' skills accord Bloom's (1956) higher-order thinking skills, while the 'knowing' and 'understanding' skills are related to the lower-order thinking skills in the taxonomy. The element of 'fairness' is the aspect of Paul and Elder's (2002) intellectual standards. The finding conforms to similar studies (e.g., Assadi et al., 2013; Kanik, 2010; Marijic & Romfelt, 2016; Meng, 2016).

The results further revealed that the participants appreciated classroom interactions in the form of student-student and instructor-student interactions. They implemented the process approach to writing, prepared inputs on different issues, encouraged collaboration, and facilitated students' learning. Practitioners (e.g., Buranapatana, 2006; Dwee et al., 2016; Fahim & Mirzaii, 2014) argued for the relevance of collaboration since it allows students to share skills and resources. Likewise, classroom interaction that involves questioning and praising students' responses is regarded as helpful. Masek and Yamin (2011) asserted that "probing questions may engage students in a systematic cognitive process that promotes the development of the student's reasoning ability" (p. 117). Students extend their exploration ability when they are appreciated for their responses and when their thought is valued (Masadeh, 2021). Moreover, Matthews and Lally (2010) signified that the process approach to writing assists to "focus thinking and sharpen thinking and reasoning within the subject" (p.137).

Contrary to their classroom practice, the participants advocated the explicit introduction of CT and the provision of an adequate chance to students. The discrepancies might be partly attributed to the participants' limited understanding of CT and lack of experience in explicitly incorporating CT in writing lessons. As different authors (e.g., Buehl & Beck, 2015; Fives & Gill, 2015; Zheng, 2015) stated, teachers' dependence on the belief that is perceived to be suitable for the immediate complex context creates the disparity. Lan and Lam (2020), conversely, argued that teachers are likely to take actions that accord with their beliefs if they hold strong beliefs in that respect. The finding is in contrast to Hasni et al.'s (2018) study that implies consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices in promoting students' CT. This might be due to the weakness of the contextual constraints in influencing the

teachers' beliefs. On the contrary, the finding agrees with Bataineh and Alazzi's (2009) study that reported the disparity between the participants' beliefs and their practices in using strategies that they claimed were useful to promote students' CT.

Moreover, the participants believed that giving students meaningful topics and assigning different writing activities help to promote students' CT. The activities demand students to be reflective, compare and contrast ideas, argue with the support of examples and reasons, and include multiple points of view. The instructors, nonetheless, failed to encourage students to read the passages that accompanied the writing activities. This implies that although the activities stimulate students' CT ability, students would not benefit much unless they understand how to handle the activities. Researchers (e.g., Kanik, 2010; Pei et al., 2017; Slavin, 2012) underscored the influence of topic meaningfulness or familiarity on students' motivation and ability to formulate sound reasoning. Moreover, the results of several studies (Çavdar & Doe, 2012; Dong, 2015; Mulnix & Mulnix, 2010; Toshpulatova & Kinjemuratova, 2020; Tuzlukova et al., 2017) indicated the relevance of argumentative, reflective, summary, report, and blog writing to promote students' CT.

Additionally, the participants considered the inclusion of CT into the evaluation system and the assessment of meaning and structure in students' text as strategies to promote students' CT. They believed that self-reflection, peer feedback, and instructor feedback give chances to students to exercise CT in writing classes. They were, however, doubtful about students' ability to provide feedback on their peers' texts. Despite mentioning the relevance of including CT in the evaluation system, the participants were rather uncertain about specific indicators of students' CT in their texts. Regardless of this, they attempted to focus on the clarity, organization, and reasoning in students' texts. Walker et al. (2003) argued that "vigorously grading on grammar instead of commenting might discourage students, inhibiting their willingness to think critically" (p. 65). Students are assumed to enhance their analytical ability, develop the ability to solve problems and recognize their mistakes and make improvements when they engage in the process of self-evaluation and peer-evaluation (Daud, 2012; Liu, 2018).

The findings, furthermore, revealed problems that affect the participants' classroom practice. The student-related factors include a limited understanding of the core elements of writing and the absence of learners' self-autonomy. The instructor-related problems were aggressiveness and reduced teaching commitment. Moreover, large classroom sizes, time constraints, and poor material preparation were considered situational factors. The finding is consistent with several studies. As indicated in some studies (e.g., Bataineh & Alazzi, 2009; Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016), teachers isolate CT from subject matter content and believe that students learn to think critically only after they acquired content knowledge. Likewise, other studies (e.g., Petek & Bedir, 2015; Schulz & FitzPatrick, 2016) revealed teachers' beliefs that students' insufficient prior

knowledge and inadequate language competence affect their CT ability. Similarly, teachers' lack of interest, students' irresponsibility for their learning, time shortage, and large class size were clarified in some studies (e.g., Bataineh & Alazzi, 2009; Ganapathy et al. 2017; Kanik, 2010; Slavin, 2012).

## Conclusion and Implication of the Study

The study investigated instructors' beliefs and practices in promoting students' CT in writing classes. The findings revealed that the writing classes were not devoid of the promotion of students' CT. The participants nurtured students' CT by fortifying classroom interaction, assigning different CT-promoting writing activities, scaffolding, and providing feedback. Nonetheless, participants' beliefs about the inclusion of CT in the evaluation system, the explicit introduction of CT, and the assessment of meaning and structure in students' texts were inconsistent with their practices. They mentioned hindering factors related to students' poor competence, inadequate instructors' commitment, time constraint, large class size, and poor quality of the course material.

The findings benefit several concerned bodies in the English language teaching sphere. University instructors obtain insights to examine their classroom decisions and then build their capacity to promote students' CT in writing classes. The study informs teacher educators about the theoretical and practical gaps concerning students' CT promotion in writing classes. Consequently, they strive to equip prospective instructors with the required knowledge about CT and the various CT-promoting pedagogical approaches. Besides, based on the detailed accounts of hindering factors related to the promotion of students' CT in writing classes, they inform prospective instructors on how to cope with the factors. Similarly, material designers may refine the quality of the writing activities by incorporating activities that stimulate students' CT. Along with the activities, they may include diverse CT-promoting strategies that direct instructors' and students' roles in writing classes. Regardless of these relevancies, the present study has limitations that can serve as a starting point for other researchers to do a higher-level investigation. Hence, further studies should be conducted on a similar issue by increasing the number of participants, assessing the participants' sources of beliefs, and making frequent observations of classroom practices.

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# Navigating the Self:
## Examining English Teacher Researcher Identity Construction Trajectory and its Relation with the Enactment of a Critical Decolonial Stance in ELT Through Collaborative Autoethnography[1].

Navegando el Yo: Examinando la Trayectoria de Construcción de la Identidad del Docente de Inglés Investigador y su Relación con la Representación de una Postura Crítica Decolonial en ELT a Través de la Autoetnografía Colaborativa.

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## Abstract:

This collaborative autoethnographic research explores the identity shaping construction trajectory of a group of three English teacher researchers as well as the repercussions that these processes had on the enactment of a critical decolonial perception toward the ELT field. Using a qualitative approach, the English teachers engaged in this collaborative autoethnography shared their experiences, beliefs, and influences to collectively examine how these influenced their evolving professional identities and their current critical understanding of the field. In general, the study reveals that collaborative autoethnography provides a unique platform for examining the identity trajectory of individuals and for establishing a connection between the past and the present. The findings similarly highlight the interplay between individual experiences, sociocultural contexts, and pedagogical practices, fostering a deeper understanding of English teacher researcher identity development. By emphasizing the significance of collective exploration, this study advocates for incorporating collaborative autoethnography more actively as a valuable tool for professional development in English education and research in general, and in Colombia in particular.

**Key words:** Autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, decoloniality, English teacher identity, English teacher researcher identity

## Resumen:

Esta investigación autoetnográfica colaborativa explora el proceso de formación identitaria de un grupo de tres profesores investigadores de inglés, así como las repercusiones que este proceso tuvo en su percepción crítica decolonial del campo ELT. Usando un enfoque cualitativo, los profesores de inglés que participaron en esta autoetnografía colaborativa compartieron sus experiencias, creencias e influencias, para así examinar colectivamente cómo estas influyeron en sus identidades profesionales y en su comprensión crítica actual del campo ELT. En general, el estudio revela que la autoetnografía colaborativa proporciona una plataforma única para examinar la trayectoria de identidad de los individuos así como para establecer una conexión entre el pasado y el presente. De igual manera los hallazgos resaltan la interacción entre las experiencias individuales, los contextos socioculturales y las prácticas pedagógicas, fomentando una comprensión más profunda del desarrollo de la identidad del profesor de inglés como investigador. Al enfatizar la importancia de la exploración colectiva, este estudio aboga por incorporar más activamente la autoetnografía colaborativa como una herramienta valiosa para el desarrollo profesional en la educación e investigación en inglés en general, y en Colombia en particular.

**Palabras clave:** Autoetnografía, autoetnografía colaborativa, decolonialidad, identidad de profesores de inglés, identidad de profesores de inglés investigadores

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# Resumo

Esta pesquisa autoetnográfica colaborativa explora o processo de formação da identidade de um grupo de três professores pesquisadores de inglês, bem como as repercussões que esse processo teve em sua percepção crítica descolonial do campo ELT. Usando uma abordagem qualitativa, os professores de inglês que participaram desta autoetnografia colaborativa compartilharam suas experiências, crenças e influências, a fim de examinar coletivamente como isso influenciou suas identidades profissionais e sua atual compreensão crítica do campo ELT. No geral, o estudo revela que a autoetnografia colaborativa fornece uma plataforma única para examinar a trajetória de identidade dos indivíduos, bem como estabelecer uma conexão entre o passado e o presente. Da mesma forma, os achados destacam a interação entre experiências individuais, contextos socioculturais e práticas pedagógicas, promovendo uma compreensão mais profunda do desenvolvimento da identidade do professor de inglês como pesquisador. Ao enfatizar a importância da exploração coletiva, este estudo defende a incorporação mais ativa da autoetnografia colaborativa como uma ferramenta valiosa para o desenvolvimento profissional na educação e pesquisa em inglês em geral, e na Colômbia em particular.

**Palavras chave:** Autoetnografia, autoetnografia colaborativa, decolonialidade, identidade de professores de inglês, identidade de professores de inglês de pesquisa

# Introduction

Stories (*hereafter narratives*) have always represented a mechanism for transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other. This fact has been supported by scholars (Merriam, 2014, Saldaña, 2011) who affirm that narratives do not only resemble a way of meaning making, but also a tool for understanding human subconsciousness in a better and more profound and rich way. Interestingly, and due to the narrative turn that took place within academia some years ago (Goodson & Gill, 2011), narratives have been gaining a growing sense of recognition in applied linguistics (AL) and in other fields as it is the case of the teaching of English as a foreign and second language (TEFL/TESL). Because of this, it is possible to affirm that now narratives are widely acknowledged sources that do not only constitute data collection and analysis processes in the recent qualitative inquiry dimensions, but are also approaches employed especially in research studies intending to explore identity construction and reconfiguration over time and across varied layers.

Bearing the previously mentioned aspects in mind, this study seeks to make a contribution to the growing body of academic literature regarding English language teacher identity construction and its intersection with collaborative autoethnography in Colombia by exploring the ways that a group of three in-service university English language teacher researchers (*who performed as the authors and participants of this study at the same time*) have shaped their identity as teachers researchers. Specifically, the study analyzes their identity shaping trajectory and how their lived experiences have contributed to construct an identity not only as researchers but also as critical decolonial scholars that push for urgent changes within ELT. The current study was carried out having in mind that this and related research initiatives may constitute a benchmark for future inquiries as despite the relatively growing acceptance of autoethnography and other approaches derived from this dimension (*netnography, collaborative autoethnography, duoethnography, community autoethnography, critical autoethnography*) along academia, more collaborative autoethnographic projects are being needed to fully cement autoethnography as a valid and worth implementing research method in English language teaching research in Colombia.

Equally important, undergoing more collaborative autoethnographic based research studies will contribute to keep expanding identity theory in Colombia, as this professional dimension has been mostly studied from the outside. An evidence of this affirmation are the multiple studies that have been conducted at a national level, like those by Guerrero and Meadows (2015), Hernández-Varona & Gutiérrez-Álvarez (2020); Lander (2018), Macias et al. (2020), Mosquera and Losada (2022), Ovalle-Quiroz and González (2023); Ubaque and Castañeda-Peña (2020); Ubaque-Casallas (2023) which although have undoubtedly improved the way English teachers' identity construction and renegotiation is perceived across diverse

levels and settings, including postgraduate education and even queer and indigenous scenarios, such an action is always done following an etic stance, that is, following an outsider position where the researcher is not intimately involved in the process. Additionally, scholarly literature existing in the field in Colombia does not seem to inform tge existing nexus between the past and current experiences that individuals go through and how said lived experiences influence the development of a critical decolonial stance towards the field and knowledge making in general.

To examine the teacher researcher identity construction trajectory of the three English teachers involved in this study, the following research questions guided the overall inquiry: What does collaborative autoethnography reveal about the identity shaping trajectory as researchers of a group of three English teachers? How are their experiences intertwined? And, finally, in what ways do these individual, sociocultural, and pedagogical practices and experiences contribute to the enactment and understanding of a critical and decolonial stance from the field? Now we present the literature review that supported this study.

## Theoretical Considerations

### *Collaborative Autoethnography as a Research Method*

Traditional research methods in applied linguistics have long been considered highly rigorous and trustworthy (Wall, 2006). This has been crucial in ensuring the correct development of research processes within the field. However, a notable shift occurred in recent years, challenging the notion that researchers should remain detached observers. Pioneering work by Ellis (1993; 1995) and other theorists led to a transformation in the perception of the researcher's role. Gradually, researchers were encouraged to become active participants in the research, as their personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts were recognized as relevant data for analysis.

Amidst this changing landscape, collaborative autoethnography emerged as a relatively new research approach, seeking to challenge traditional and authoritative perspectives that prioritized the rigor of conventional research methods and scientific objectivity (Wall, 2008). Broadly speaking, collaborative autoethnography involves analyzing the narratives shared by participants to uncover commonalities and divergences, shedding light on their experiences within specific sociocultural contexts (Chang et al., 2016). When undergoing collaborative autoethnography, the participant/researcher plays a pivotal role in the process, serving as the epistemological and ontological nexus (Spry, 2001) upon which the process and overall results are obtained.

Although collaborative autoethnography may initially appear focused on individual experiences ("I"), it transcends the personal realm. Thus, one of the key characteristics

of collaborative autoethnography is its focus on inclusivity and shared authorship, where multiple researchers or participants collaborate in the research process, bringing diverse perspectives and insights to the table. Participants and researchers engaging in collaborative autoethnography must consider the social, cultural, linguistic, and political dimensions surrounding their experiences. By examining the interplay between personal traits and cultural influences, collaborative autoethnography facilitates a holistic analysis of the narratives and events under exploration (Méndez, 2014). Additionally, collaborative autoethnography embraces reflexivity, encouraging researchers to openly acknowledge their own subjectivities, emotions, and biases, thereby enhancing the transparency and credibility of the research findings. This approach is particularly valuable in illuminating complex social issues, fostering empathy, and generating knowledge that is both rigorous and deeply human-centered.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that successfully conducting collaborative autoethnography involves a carefully orchestrated series of steps to ensure a rich and meaningful research journey. The first critical step is assembling a diverse and committed group of researchers or participants who are willing to actively engage in the collaborative process, establishing clear communication channels and establishing trust among all involved parties is essential. Next, a well-defined research focus or topic should be chosen, one that resonates with all collaborators. The data collection phase follows, where each participant shares their personal narratives and experiences related to the chosen topic. This step can include written accounts, audio or video recordings, or any other medium that captures the essence of their narratives. Once the data is collected, the analysis phase begins, where the group collaboratively delves into the shared narratives to identify patterns, themes, and connections. This collective sensemaking process ensures a multiplicity of perspectives, enriching the interpretation. Lastly, the results are displayed and shared with the community willing to get involved in the process. These steps served as the basis for the current study, and for a better understanding of them they will be better explained in the methodology section.

## Methodology

The implementation of this research study was grounded in the qualitative paradigm, and it embraced a collaborative autoethnographic methodology to explore a pertinent social phenomenon. The decision to adopt the collaborative autoethnographic approach went beyond our mere and superficial preference; it was driven by its unique ability to depart from the traditional detachment of researchers and instead foster a deep connection between the personal experiences of the authors and the subject under investigation. Indeed, collaborative autoethnography offered a distinct advantage in that it permitted a collective exploration of researcher subjectivity. By intertwining individual narratives, the researchers found themselves intricately woven into the social dimension they sought to understand. This integration with the social

dimension, as highlighted by Ariza-Quiñones et al. (2022), further strengthens the position of collaborative autoethnography as a highly social approach to qualitative research that is not only on the process perse and on the results obtained, but on the people who underlie such a process.

### Participant- Researchers' Positionalities

#### Mosquera-Pérez

I am a Colombian ELT professor and scholar that identifies as a professional under a constant process of construction (Barkhuizen, 2016; Danielewicz, 2014) as my identity trajectory has been redefined based on several experiences I have been through. I have taught English across all educational contexts, and at this moment I am performing as a full time English teacher educator researcher who is teaching pre-service EFL teachers within the context of a foreign language teacher education program in a Colombian public university. As such, I have been actively involved with research processes that range from English as an international lingua franca, World Englishes, critical discourse analysis, teacher's identity, among others.

#### Hurtado-Torres

I am Ángela, an English teacher whose identity as a person and as a professional has been highly influenced by my roots. I am the daughter of the first generation of a peasant family that had the opportunity to go to the university. I have worked in public and private schools and universities in Colombia and in the United States. Currently, I am performing as a full time English teacher in a Colombian private university. My interest for vindicating the stories of communities that , same as rural areas, have been invisibilized, has made that my research interests lean towards social justice practices, fostering in students the critical thinking, connecting school learning with everydayness, raising awareness about the power and knowledge relation, with the objective of encouraging a social transformation.

#### Pérez-Diaz

I am a Colombian foreign language teacher whose teaching practice has been influenced by multiple national and international cultures. Being exposed to foreign cities such as Poitiers in France and Thessaloniki in Greece have made me rethink my teaching identity and conclude that my role in teaching is not limited to my country or only one place, but to the world (Guerrero & Quintero, 2021). Similarly, I have had

the opportunity to work in all educational contexts (both children and youth, as well as university students and adults seeking employment opportunities). I currently work as a full-time English teacher and French tutor at a private Colombian university.

My interest in research is centered on the fact that I have been exposed to different ideologies of various European countries which have led me to perceive a worldwide culture. These events have made my critical spirit increase and at the same time instill a  solid goodwill for my students to reflect beyond learning metalinguistic aspects of the foreign language. Likewise, transmitting this critical thinking through the material design is something that attracts my attention since it is the way to constitute a living and active resource for future teaching practices.

# Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned above, when undergoing CAE reflexivity plays a crucial role throughout the process. As the participants and researchers directly involved, we had to openly acknowledge our own subjectivities, emotions, and biases, understanding their influence on the research process and findings. This transparency enhanced the rigor and authenticity of the study. Bearing these elements in mind, and as a way to weave together our own interpretations, reflections, and insights into a cohesive narrative, we decided to follow the framework proposed by Fallas-Escobar and Pentón-Herrera's (2022) in their inquiry, and followed a three step process for data collection and analysis, being these as follow:

## Step 1: Setting the Ground

Before formally beginning this research process, we held constant meetings with the purpose of identifying narratives and experiences that could serve as our data. We held these types of face to face meetings for a couple of months, and once we decided upon the experiences we would be analyzing, we agreed on the need to better understand those that had contributed to the construction of our teacher researchers identity by way of a collaborative autoethnography. At this point we established to write about instances that had influenced or not the construction of our identity as researchers. Such a writing process was unstructured and we agreed on the need to write about what we considered was relevant for the aforementioned process. We agreed to constantly share our texts with the others so that we could continuously be engaged with the data being gathered and with the initial experiences being reconstructed.

## Step 2: Formalizing the Process and Sharing our Initial Narratives

Once we had the initial drafts of our texts, we proceeded to share them with one another. At this point we observed that we had written about many significant experiences within our time as undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although most of these experiences were significant to us, we decided to narrow down our experiences and principally centered our attention on those having to do with research during our time as students in the two aforementioned scenarios. We are mentioning this because even if we acknowledge that all the experiences we had written about were important, analyzing all of them in a single research article would be practically impossible. Thus, and as suggested in previous lines, we focused on particular research experiences that took place in our time as former bachelor's and master's degree students.

## Step 3: Strengthening our Narratives and Establishing Themes

This was the final step of the process. At this stage we read each other´s narratives again bearing in mind the research objectives we had initially established. If a first reading of the narratives gave us an initial idea of the experiences that contributed to the initial shaping of our identity as teacher researchers, this second round of analysis allowed us to develop a more profound understanding of these. In this sense, themes having to do with initial experiences with research held in the frame of our corresponding undergraduate programs (as students, with professors, in research seedbeds), and subsequent experiences we had been engaged in (within the context of our respective master degrees, and our own work as ELT researchers) began to emerge. At this point, we compared and contrasted once more these initial codes and established some final categories, namely: 1) *Undergraduate Education and Initial Experiences with Research: The Emergence of a Teacher Researcher Identity?, 2) Experiences with Research in Postgraduate Education and Beyond: Towards an Endless Path of Transformation, and 3) Performing as Critical Decolonial Scholars: Enacting a Reflexive and Transformational Stance in ELT and Beyond Through Research.* Below we provide richer details for each one of them.

# Findings

## Undergraduate Education and Initial Experiences with Research: The Emergence of a Teacher Researcher Identity?

Becoming an English teacher requires formally enrolling in a foreign language teacher education program. It happened to the three of us. Through the development of the narratives we observed that we had an element in common: we joined a teacher education program from two different universities in Colombia because of our desire to be educators working within the ELT field. However, while we were considering this possibility back in our years as students, we never thought of doing research or becoming teacher researchers as an important aspect to develop, as appreciated in the following pieces of data:

"*Each story has its own beginning. Mine started at the age of 15. The year was 2008. I was at home, resting on the floor of my house. I was considering the path I would be taking for my life, when, suddenly, my mom (who has always been characterized for her wise way of thinking) approached me and said: Jhon, have you ever thought about what you would like to be in the future? Naturally, my answer was not very clear (probably a product of my immature way of seeing life at that time). After a couple of minutes, mom replied to my answer and said: why do not you consider the option of becoming an English teacher. I find it necessary to stress that I was not totally sure about mom´s recommendations, but what she said later on was what definitively engaged me in the process of learning English at university level. Her words were literally these: if you studied English, Jhon, you would have the chance of making a decent living apart from being able to travel all over the world, because English is the global language (Nunan, 2001). When I think about my mom's speech, I acknowledge that her words have always resonated in my head, as most of the things she "predicted" back in 2008, are part of my memory now*" (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 1).

"*I always liked the Spanish subject when I was studying at school. And since my sister had already joined university, she got me the syllabus of the Modern Languages program with an emphasis on Spanish-English and talked to me about the subjects that were part of this undergraduate degree. I wasn't sure I wanted to study English, but my sister told me that by studying languages, my field of action would be wider and I would have more possibilities of getting a better job. Since that conversation I had with her, when I was in tenth grade, I began to study the English language on my own thanks to material that my sister and my teachers at school got me. In tenth and eleventh grade, my attention was focused on the two languages. Hence, my motivation to study the degree I chose was on one hand, the like I had for my mother tongue, and on the other hand, the influence that other people who were aware of the possible advantages this would bring me had on me*" (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

The just mentioned aspect is reinforced in the following data retrieved from the narrative by Pérez-Diaz who similarly remarked not feeling attracted by research back in his years as an undergraduate student due to various circumstances. In his words,

he expresses that he remembers when he "*started taking a course called "research methodology" I perceived doing research as something boring, too methodical, and impractical. I remember that it was a very structured class where we had to deliver brief reports on each methodology and approach, but everything only stayed on paper, as we did not perform any formal research process. I consider this class should be the basis for the research project that as students we should present at the end of our studies, but after seeing that little was done, at that time I was not interested in investigating or in getting to know more about different topics related to my profession*" (Pérez-Diaz - Narrative 1)

Thus, it is possible to affirm that we all enrolled in a teacher education program with the purpose of merely becoming language teachers in order to have more academic and professional opportunities. It is especially observable in Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres' narratives who affirm that they decided to study a bachelor's degree with an emphasis on languages because of the influence that people surrounding them exerted on that regard.

In connection with these elements, some authors including Papanastasiou and Papanastasiou (1997) and Kyriacou et al. (1999) affirm that individuals enroll in teacher education programs without having a clear sense of direction, as in two research studies they carried out participants reported having made the decision of becoming teachers because of the influence their families and friends exerted on them, as seen in our own cases. Nevertheless, in another research study Macías et al. (2020) determined that even though at the very beginning pre-service teachers do not have the intention of staying in the profession, after exposure to all types of experiences, these students begin to develop an initial teacher identity that further motivates them to remain within the field. Taking into consideration these affirmations, here we find it necessary to highlight that something similar happened to us, but with research. At the beginning of our studies we did not plan engaging with research or becoming teacher researchers due to some negative and demotivating experiences we had. This is better expressed by two of us:

> "*The experiences I had in terms of research during my undergraduate studies were few, if not null. All of us were required to take at least 2 research courses called "Research Methodology" and "Research Seminar". Despite having to take these 2 mandatory courses (since they belonged to the syllabus of the degree) I feel that what I learned was minimal. Both times I had classes with the same professor, but even after taking these classes (for the 4th and 5th academic semester), it was not even clear to me what the concepts of qualitative or quantitative research implied*" (Mosquera- Pérez, Narrative 1).

> "*Now that I think of it I can only say that the experiences I had were few. I did not have many peers involved in research in my career and the few who did it, did not have good experiences. Teachers who were in charge of the research courses generally dedicated themselves to mentioning the parts of a project, and the types of research. I had several seminars. One of them was titled "pedagogical and investigative projects". For this course, I had to go to public institutions to make observations to subsequently design improvement strategies. In the sixth semester, I had*

*to take the research methodology course. I remember that in this subject we had to learn some investigative concepts almost by heart, something which made me feel disinterested towards the class. In the eighth semester I had to take another course known as "research project". In this seminar we had to present a proposal for the development of the thesis, but I feel that most of us proposed some ideas only for approving the subject. I did not have any other course on research, and because of all of these experiences, I was never motivated to carry out a project by myself"* (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

As illustrated above, in his time as an undergraduate student Mosquera-Pérez had to take some courses regarding research. However, it seems that such courses did not have an impact on his understanding of the field. The same occurred with Hurtado-Torres. She similarly affirms that despite having to take some research related subjects, she did not find any motivation to continue doing research or to assume research as a possible path to follow in her future professional trajectory. Consequently, we did not see ourselves as researchers nor fully understood the importance of doing research in a field as it is the case of ELT. Because of these frustrations, we would even avoid future experiences with research at all cost:

*"In the tenth semester I did a classroom project with a classmate, and I needed to do the thesis as a requirement for graduation. Unfortunately, we did not have an advisor to guide us and we did not feel like we were making any progress. As we were in a hurry to graduate, we gave up on the project, and I decided to enroll in a master's degree as a modality to graduate and not to have to do a research project. That's how I graduated from college"* (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 1).

*"I did not have any type of experience with research (thesis/monographs), research seedbeds, or the like because the experience I had had with the research courses had not been the best. In fact, having taken these courses made me feel discouraged about what research involves to the point of feeling extremely boring and difficult. I remember that because of the situation, many of my classmates and I took a degree seminar entitled "Multiple Intelligences" to avoid carrying out our respective thesis. A couple of friends intended to develop a thesis project, but they constantly told me that it was an arduous process, and that it required a lot of time, reading, and preparation. They finally gave up with the project"* (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 1).

From the three of us, only Pérez-Díaz seems to have had positive experiences when it comes to research in his time as an undergraduate student, as he specifically narrates in the following reflection *"I remember that when I was at the university, a classmate told me about a research seedbed related to the dissemination of the French language through radio. This seedbed is called JOIE, which means joy. Upon receiving the invitation from my classmate, I found myself a little insecure about this experience since I did not know what my tasks would consist of in that hotbed. I was afraid of starting a new process with people who knew about doing research in the subject. It got me worried, honestly. However, it was a very good experience"* (Pérez-Díaz, Narrative 1).

Concerning the aforementioned elements, it appears that even though pre-service EFL teachers must take research oriented courses in the frame of their language teacher

education programs, this action does not necessarily guarantee the shaping of an initial teacher researcher identity, as seen in the previously exemplified data. Hence, we think that it is necessary to expose pre-service teachers to other types of experiences with the intention of raising among them a higher degree of interest towards said dimension. This has been suggested by authors including Mesa-Villa et al. (2020) and Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) for whom engaging in research seedbeds as well as promoting continuous reflection among teachers constitute some of the main factors which may contribute to the resignification of their identity as researchers.

It is worth remarking that although at the beginning of our professional trajectory we did not plan to do research or saw ourselves as researchers because of our lack of experience and guidance, this notion of teachers as researchers would progressively change through time and due to postgraduate education, as in this space we underwent motivational and challenging intellectual opportunities that nurtured our practices.

## Experiences with Research in and After Postgraduate Education: Towards an Endless Path of Transformation.

Despite having been engaged in certain courses with research and with other research related activities (as it was the case of Pérez-Díaz who participated in a research seedbed) it is not possible to hold that the formation we received in undergraduate education was enough to contribute to the consolidation of our identity as teacher researchers. On the contrary, by the time of finishing our studies, and as stressed in the above paragraphs, we did not perceive research as an opportunity to continue growing as professionals. Consequently, we did not consider ourselves as teacher researchers or as teachers who could engage at some point with research projects and activities. This situation would change, however, by the moment we undertook postgraduate studies.

Following the view of Álvarez-Valencia (2009) and Viafara and Largo (2018) postgraduate education constitutes the perfect scenario for teachers to develop other dimensions of their professional lives. In their research work, for example, Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) established that after having finished their master's degree in English language teaching, EFL teachers became empowered critical reflective educators. As such, they did not only conceive the teaching profession from a different perspective (a more conscious one). Further than that, they incorporated research related activities in their corresponding educational scenarios more frequently. Thus, it is possible to assert that undergoing postgraduate education contributes to the consolidation of a teacher researcher identity. The same happened to us.

The opportunity of engaging in postgraduate studies (a master's degree, to be more explicit) did not only allow us to develop a higher understanding of our field. Beyond this, this experience permitted us to begin the construction of our identity as teacher researcher as within the frame of this experience we had contact with more

experienced teachers from whom we learned a lot. This specific aspect is observable in Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres's narratives:

*"As I have suggested so far, I consider that the construction of my identity as a researcher was not something that happened precisely at the undergraduate level. Furthermore, I consider that the experiences I had during my undergraduate studies did not even contribute to the development of my initial identity as a researcher. On the contrary, the experiences I had there made me feel alienated from the field of research because I didn't see any use in it. It is precisely in the context of my master's degree that my identity as a researcher begins to take shape. I remember that one of the events that most marked the beginning of my career as a researcher was the contact with a professor who was in charge of the course Research II as this person was constantly telling us about the benefits that doing research would have for our future careers. However, he did not only center on this fact. Also, he made us aware about the impact that the previously pointed activity would have not only on our lives as professionals but also as academics who in a certain way would contribute to the construction and consolidation of the ELT field at a national level"* (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 2).

"*All my research seminar teachers were quite inspiring, with a long trajectory at research. In the first semester I took the seminar: Research Foundations. This course marked a before and after for me in terms of research. As I have remarked, in undergraduate I felt that research was always aimed at improving a skill. However, when I presented my research proposal to my professor in the master's degree I did, he told me that I could impact a community through my research work. Since that moment, I began to consider the possibility of implementing my study in a rural community as I wanted to generate an impact. I remember that such a moment was very special because it changed my perspective of research. I felt that research could fulfill one of my passions, which is working for people from rural communities*" (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 2).

As just seen, Mosquera-Pérez maintains that sharing with one specific professor who taught within the context of the master's degree he was undertaking was one of the aspects that contributed to the initial development of his identity as a teacher researcher. In a few words, the aforementioned professor exerted an influence on him. Similarly, Hurtado-Torres highlights that being in contact with professors with a long research trajectory contributed to her formation process. Besides this, she suggests that because of the cordial recommendation of one of her mentors, she even began to combine her own interests with research, and, as a result, one of her research lines was defined.

In connection with these elements, Wenger (1999) remarks that certain dimensions inherent to teacher identity construction take place in the doing. Thus, and as displayed in the previous data, constantly sharing with professional teacher researchers plays an essential role in the formation of one's own identity as researcher. However, we deem it necessary to clarify this is not the only factor that has a repercussion on the aforementioned process. Other experiences such as attending academic conferences derived from the process itself of studying a masters's degree were also important, as exemplified in the following lines retrieved from Hurtado-Torres' narrative:

"*I had the opportunity to give presentations while I was doing my master's degree. It was 2018, and I was a third semester student when I submitted my presentation to an event called "Teachers' Moot". This event was organized by the master's program I was studying at that moment, and it was the first time I presented in those types of scenarios. However, that was only the first experience of three I had in total by that time. I also presented in ASOCOPI in Cartagena, and another one organized by Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. In general, those experiences were very enriching and significant for me as these constituted a dream that came true*" (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 2).

At this point, Hurtado-Torres acknowledges the significant contributions that having participated in some academic events had for her initial teacher researcher identity process. Beyond this, she recognizes that by participating in these events, our own research works may profit based on continuous feedback coming from other scholars partaking in such spaces:

"*Next year, by 2019, a professor from my university helped me along with another colleague to send our presentation to the "ICQI" (International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry" run by the University of Illinois, in the United States. Once again, I saw how dreams that seemed impossible were materializing. I had the opportunity to travel and participate in the congress, and to this day I feel that I do not have words to describe how incredible it was. In the first place, it was very interesting to learn about the topics that were being investigated. On the other hand, it was also very interesting to observe firsthand the way those themes were presented, since many of the speakers gave an account of their studies through various artistic expressions. I was scared about my presentation, but in the table where I presented people were nice and made significant contributions to the study I was developing*"

Hurtado-Torres was not the only participant that recognized the importance of academic events for the initial formation of her identity as a teacher researcher. Mosquera-Pérez further acknowledges this aspect, as seen in the following lines:

"*I would like to stress that thanks to having submitted my first presentation at an academic event, and after having been so well received, I decided to continue participating actively as a speaker in specialized ELT events. Up to this point, I have participated as a speaker in approximately 15 national and international academic events as I understood that attending these types of scenarios is of paramount importance when it comes to knowledge dissemination*" (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 2).

Interestingly, although we were able to establish that the whole experiences we had in our time in postgraduate education were fundamental for the progressive development of our identity as teacher researchers, we also recognize the fact that experiences we have had after that time have been decisive for the consolidation of such a dimension. In this regard, Hurtado-Torres and Pérez-Díaz state the following:

"*In 2021 I began to work in the university which is my current institutional affiliation, and there I met Professors Mosquera-Pérez and Pérez-Díaz. We formed a group with the purpose of doing research and up to date we have developed three studies. This experience has been highly beneficial in the sense that I have had the opportunity of improving my knowledge of the design*

*of instruments and other similar aspects when it comes to doing research. Additionally, and because of this, we have had the opportunity of participating in congresses outside the country, spaces in which we have not only received very relevant feedback, but we have also made connections to collaborate with our projects. Hence, it has been a very valuable opportunity".* (Hurtado-Torres, Narrative 3).

"*Now that I work for a university, I have had the opportunity to have new investigative experiences and I have been also able to work with two colleagues who are professors Mosquera-Pérez and Hurtado-Torres. This process has helped me to know and learn from the investigative practices of my colleagues, which I see as something very positive for my professional training*" (Pérez-Díaz, Narrative 3).

In her narrative 3, Hurtado-Torres recognizes that after the experiences she was exposed to in postgraduate education, she has had the opportunity of engaging in research with two other colleagues (prof. Mosquera-Pérez and Pérez-Díaz) in order to continue doing investigations revolving around her research interests. Similarly, in his narrative 3, Pérez-Díaz stresses that by being engaged in such a work, his knowledge about different dimensions of knowledge having to do with research seems to have improved. Hence, assuming a more active role when it comes to research and professional networking is one of the characteristics that teacher researchers enact.

We deem it necessary to mention that even if it appears to be that after our initial experiences with research in postgraduate education we were more willing to expand our network and be actively engaged with other professionals from the field, we were also able establish that for us research transcended instrumental and objectifying stances and became a lifelong endeavor through which could construct knowledge while helping others. In turn, we began to conceive research as a mechanism to collaborate with people and communities surrounding us, as displayed by Hurtado-Torres who comments that "*It is necessary to mention that the work we have done has strengthened many of my skills. It has allowed me to recognize that my identity as a researcher also allows me to have a voice and thus generate important transformations in the field of ELT and within my own classroom context*".

## Performing as Critical Decolonial Scholars: Enacting a Reflexive and Transformational Stance in ELT and Beyond Through Research

Maybe one of the most powerful takeaways derived from this collaborative autoethnography is that beyond assuming research and our identity as teacher researchers as an opportunity to grow professionally, it constitutes a chance to critically examine the field while promoting courses of action and change. This is clearly reflected in the narrative provided by Hurtado-Torres who contends that "*as my research journey progressed, I encountered professors who empathized with my evolving*

*perspective. Nevertheless, this path towards a more profound and human-centered research methodology was fraught with challenges. Pursuing topics not considered contemporarily relevant exposed me to marginalization within academic circles. I felt both excluded and reluctant to conform to an environment characterized by individualism and competitiveness, contrary to the research identity I was cultivating"*

In her excerpt, Hurtado-Torres acknowledges that by being engaged in research and with different professionals and communities, she understands that the ultimate goal of engaging in research should not be that of profiting in an economic or professional way. Further than that, she now thinks that research should be a tool to help human beings and communities improve not only at an intellectual but also at a humanistic level. The same stance can be encountered in the case of Pérez-Diaz who stresses that

*"Pedagogical experiences are a fundamental space to reflect on the traditional educational paradigms that have been imposed since colonization since they serve as a guide to question and challenge the power structures and hegemonic knowledge that have been imposed throughout history. Both in my role as an undergraduate and graduate student, as well as in my current role as an English and French teacher, I have witnessed a colonial education characterized by the imposition of a single form of knowledge, privileging the Western perspective and denying the richness and diversity of other knowledge and cultures. Thus, in my perspective, I perceive that Colombian teachers have been victims and accomplices at the same time of a mentality dependent on this "global north". This is the specific case of the design of materials where I have perceived throughout my experience that the priority is to hire foreign publishing agencies and not to encourage the creation of autonomous didactic materials. This has generated an educational system that perpetuates inequalities and exclusion, since the experiences and knowledge of teachers are neither recognized nor valued, and in the case of indigenous communities, Afro-descendants and other cultural minorities, they play a negligible role in the classroom"*

In the two cases shown above, Hurtado-Torres and Pérez-Díaz maintain that their perspectives towards research and knowledge in general have changed due to their continuous contact with other researchers as well as and dynamics taking place within the field. This is similarly illustrated by Mosquera-Pérez for whom the notion of what bilingualism is, has evolved.

*"Getting directly into my understanding of what bilingualism implies, I feel totally necessary to maintain that now I am more fully aware of all what it requires, implies and signifies for a nation like Colombia. It is really curious to perceive that while at postgraduate education and from our role as academics in formation we are already assuming more autonomous, critical, and emancipatory perspectives, in undergraduate education we were not aware of all what it requires and implies to be an English language teacher, or, as Guerrero (2008) suggests, we were not even given the opportunity to. Thus, one of our challenges and future endeavors as English language teachers, I believe, will be giving our students the chance of not only become aware of the fact that bilingualism goes much beyond the mere English/Spanish relationship, but also make them acquainted with the latest issues and trends within the field such as English as an international lingua franca, global Englishes languages teaching, postmethod pedagogies as well*

*as critical/emancipatory methods so that they will also have the opportunity of contributing the the development of a more autonomous less hegemonized Colombian society where mainly the powerful can decide"* (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 3)

*"Intriguingly, the just mentioned situations align with what Kachru (2012) has referred to as "three circles models" for the teaching of English. According to this professor, in expanding circle countries (like Colombia among others) the teaching of English merely responds to international agendas (Correa & Usma, 2013; Valencia, 2013) which sell the idea of progress through English (Escobar, 2013). In this sense, individuals who can afford to pay for better language education will have better job and education opportunities over those who can not pay for those services, leading the English language towards a condition that professor Mahboob (2011) regards as a "gatekeeper"* (Mosquera-Pérez, Narrative 3)

Equally important, Mosquera-Pérez manifests that his perception of what English education and bilingualism implies goes much beyond, and now he recognizes that while it is undeniable that English is a language that offers privileges and benefits, it also oppresses people and communities at large, especially the most vulnerable.

*"The gatekeeping condition that the English language has been exerting in Colombia is something really preoccupying. On the one hand, there are individuals who have much money to pay for international exchange programs, intensive preparation courses as well as for the materials required for it. On the other hand, there are individuals who must decide whether to work for eating or studying. Therefore, how can we as English language teachers contribute to the improvement of all of these situations? And more importantly, how are we ensuring that from our role we are not being some of the perpetrators of all of these conditions? Well, to be honest, I have no answer yet. What I am pretty sure of is that at least by being aware of all of these facts and of all of what bilingualism and bilingual education really implies, we will be able to give one step at a time and will surely contribute to the transition from teacher-centered and traditional cognitive/linguistic oriented ones to more sociocritical student-centered models of teaching; which is something our Colombian society really needs"*

To finish, we would like to sustain that although engaging in research and in other professional and community related practices has allowed a more profound and critical decolonial understanding of the field, and even if we now advocate more frequently for social justice and other human-centered approaches and practices in English language teaching, embracing the role of critical-decolonialized teacher/researchers has been a complex and challenging evolution. Therefore, it becomes essential to keep promoting English teaching otherwise stances that do not sell the idea of English as the "key" to the world, but approaches and practices that promote multiculturalism, multilingualism, language ecologies, English as a lingua franca and world Englishes oriented pedagogies, to mention a few, as a manner to continue decolonizing ELT. This is our biggest commitment at the moment of writing our narratives, and letting you know what we have learned along this ongoing way.

# Conclusions

The first conclusion we drew from this collaborative autoethnographic study is that the experiences held in the context of undergraduate education were not enough to develop an initial teacher researcher identity. Even if we were exposed to some experiences regarding research, these did not give us the tools nor the chance for understanding why becoming ELT researchers was important. Thus, more constantly exposing and engaging pre-service EFL teachers to research since undergraduate education is important if they are expected to contribute to the advancement of the field. Promoting research oriented practices from an early stage in teacher education can contribute to the detachment of knowledge production systems which merely situates Anglo and Euro-centered perspectives, as historically speaking research has been perceived as an activity that only experts, especially those coming from more powerful settings, can perform.

Another conclusion we obtained after the sharing of our narratives and after the implementation of the overall study is that even if experiences held in the frame of postgraduate education were fundamental for the initial construction of our identity as teacher researchers, continuous engagement in research and in other community and professional development activities are essential for the proper consolidation of an identity as a researcher. These scenarios should be more constantly promoted with the intention of raising awareness among educators about the importance that research has for their professional lives and for the overall ELT field. Besides, it is important to promote research not only as an activity to achieve professional advancements, that is, getting higher employment positions in life. Research and engagement in knowledge production should be promoted so that pre-service teachers and in-service teachers alike understand the importance and impact that this activity may have for a country like Colombia. Development and more socially aware practices, among others, could be the result of such an action.

Lastly, we would like to finish this article by inviting other researchers and educators to continue examining teacher researcher identity and other dimensions of the field as it is the case of professional development and teachers' agency through collaborative autoethnography. Although this is a relatively new approach for doing research in Colombia, promoting more studies revolving around collaborative autoethnography could help enrich scholarly literature in national ELT by examining how multiple dimension having to do with the self that educators enact are being constructed across diverse scenarios (be these undergraduate or postgraduate education) in the national context. This was our case. Although we initially did not see nor conceive research as a potential mechanism for growing professionally while helping others around us, now we believe that research has the power to keep influencing society in a positive way. This collaborative autoethnography, though, is not the final result of our self-reflection process. It is an ongoing analysis derived from a wider project that seeks to analyze

and better understand how language ideologies, pedagogical practices, and Global North and Global South epistemologies intertwine when it comes to the continuous identity construction and negotiation process that in-service EFL teachers go through. These results will be shared on another occasion, once the process has been finalized (considering that one's identity is continuously being influenced by multiple factors we encounter in life and academia). Then, time will tell.

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# Guidelines for Authors

GiST Journal ISSN (1692-5777) is a peer-reviewed journal published bi-annually by the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana (ÚNICA)* in Bogotá, Colombia.

**Content.** GiST Journal disseminates the results of national and international studies in language education, particularly in bilingual education and language learning innovation. GiST addresses related topics including language policy, the relationship between language, culture, and society, the role of first and second languages, teaching methodologies, learning strategies, educational planning, and other topics related to language education.

**Journal Aim.** To disseminate the results of national and international research carried out in the field of language education, in particular bilingual education, as well as innovations in language teaching and learning.

**Readership.** GiST Journal is directed towards students, researchers, educators, policy makers, and other parties interested in the field of (or in fields related to) language education.

**Periodicity.** GiST is published in English bi-annually by ÚNICA, Bogotá Colombia. The January- June issue includes articles accepted from October to January of the year of the publication, and the July- December issue articles accepted from the previous April – July of the year of publication.

**Submission of articles.** Authors must submit documents exclusively and directly via the platform of Open Journal Systems (OJS). Users must register, and articles should be submitted by clicking on the link "online submissions." Submissions are received in the dates established and published by GIST. Submissions to GIST can be sent via: https://latinjournal.org/index.php/gist/issue/view/66

**Documentation required.** Additionally**,** authors must attach these documents via the OJS platform.

1. Letter addressed to the Editor of GiST Journal, requesting the evaluation of the article.

2. The Letter of Copyright Assignment Agreement and Conflict of Interest Statement, both signed by the author(s), verifying that the article is original, and that it has not been published or submitted to another journal for consideration. This format is available on GIST's page, in the Editorial section, also in the OJS platform.

3. CV for each author including studies, professional experience, current position, and institutional affiliation. In addition, each author's full name should be given in the order in which they wish to appear.

**Article Presentation Format**

**Language.** The article should be in English.

**Tone.** Articles should present scientific, scholarly, and professional research on language education. All biases towards gender, sexual orientation, racial, or ethnic groups should be avoided, as should all prejudiced statements involving disabilities or age. Historical and interpretative inaccuracies (quoting a work inappropriately) are not acceptable.

**Length.** At least 15 but no more than 25 pages.

**Software**. The article should be submitted in a recent version of Microsoft Word.

**Style.** Authors should follow *the **Publication Manual of the APA** (Seventh Edition, 2019) for writing style in gen*eral as well as references. Some key aspects of the general APA style include:

a. Using just one space, not two, between all words and sentences.

b. Using a ½ inch (five to seven space) indentation on every paragraph.

c. Placing reference citations within the text (and not as a footnote).

d. Spacing in-text references according to the example: (Johnson, 2003).

e. Keeping direct quotations to a minimum. When included, following the APA guidelines for short quotations (less than 40 words, identify the quotation with quotation marks as part of the main text format, and include the page number of the source), and long quotations (more than 40 words, use block paragraph format for the quotation and include the page number of the source).

f. Placing punctuation *within* quotation marks, according to the example: ...word."

g. Using the 12 point Times New Roman font, for readability.

h. Double-spacing the entire text.

i. Utilizing commas before the word *and* or *or* in a series of three or more items.

j. Using digits (e.g., 10; 78; 394) only for numbers 10 and above. Other numbers under 10 may be written out (e.g., four, nine, seven).

k. Differentiating in the format used with a *table* and a *figure* in the graphics which accompany one's article.

l. Implementing the editorial "we" or "I" (with the active voice), which is perfectly acceptable nowadays, and even preferred over the use of the passive voice.

m. Using the five levels of APA heading, (which are not to be numbered).

Although we encourage authors to use the reference lists of previously published GiST Journal articles as a model, seven general examples follow. Please notice that each reference includes the authors name, date of publication, title of the work, and publication data.

Martínez, A. A., Jones, B. B., & Schmidt, C. C. (1997). Título de artículo en español [Title of article translated into English]. *Name of Journal*, *8*(3), 492-518.

Chang, F. F., & Donovan, P. P. (Eds.). (1985). *Title of work*. Location: Publisher.

Martínez, A. A. (2009). Title of chapter. In E. E. Godoy (Ed.), *Title of book* (pp. xx-xx). Location: Publisher.

Martínez, A. A., & Jones, B. B. (2010). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, 24, pp. xx-xx. doi:xx.xxxxxxxxxx

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Chang, F. F (2000, July). *Title of paper or poster*. Paper or poster session presented at the meeting of Organization Name, Location.

Martínez, A. A. (2002, October 12). Title of article. *Name of Newspaper*, pp. B2, B6.

**Graphic Aides.** Original tables, figures, photographs, graphics, or other digital files which are necessary for comprehension are encouraged. Graphics should be original and may not be reproduced from copyrighted material. Graphics may be included in the text of the article in the place where they should appear. All figures and tables should be black and white.

**Title.** The article's title should be brief and allow readers to identify the topic and content easily.

**Origin of the Article**. It is necessary to specify if the article is the result of research, a graduation thesis, an essay, or critique. In the case of it being a product of a research project, the author should indicate the project title, the financing source, sponsoring institution, and project phase.

**Abstract.** All abstracts should be in English and in Spanish. The abstract should include the scope and intention of the paper, with a concise description of the methodology, supporting theories, general results, and main conclusions.

**Keywords**. There is a maximum of seven keywords, which must be presented in English as well as Spanish.


### Types of Articles

1. **Scientific or technological research article:** A document which presents in detail the original results of a research project. The structure generally contains seven important sections: and abstract, an introduction, a review of the literature, the methodology, the outcomes, the conclusions, and a reference list.

2. **Reflective article:** A document which presents in detail the results of a research project from the analytical, interpretive, or critical perspective of the author, on a specific topic, with clear references to the original sources.

3. **Review Article:** A document which is the result of research in which the results of certain research projects which have or have not been published are analyzed, systematized, and integrated together with the objective of demonstrating advances and developmental tendencies. This type of manuscript is characterized by its presentation of a careful bibliographic summary of at least 50 references.

**Peer Review Process**

As GIST is a bi-annual publication, the Editorial Committee publishes two calls for papers, in approximately April and November of each year. GIST then receives submissions until the published deadline, and carries out the following process with each submission:

The Editor carries out a preliminary evaluation before assigning peer reviewers, with the purpose of verifying that the article complies with the established criteria and guidelines for presentation of articles. This revision is usually completed within a three-week period.

In the case of articles that do not comply with the standards for presentation, according to the specifications of the journal, the Editor requests that the authors adjust the article in order to prepare it to be reviewed by peer reviewers. Authors are given a two-week period to make the requested modifications, and re-send the manuscript again to the Editor for consideration. Once the Editor has verified that the article fits the standards of presentation and specifications of the journal, the process of peer review may begin.

The Editor informs authors of the decision to submit the article to peer review or not within one month.

Articles that fulfill the presentation requirements are submitted to anonymous, double-blind peer review by experts in the field. This means that authors do not know the identity of the reviewers, and vice versa.

The Editor, with the help of members of the Editorial Committee, assigns peer reviewers according to the specific topic of each article. The Editor then invites peers to conduct the review, and once these individuals accept, they are informed as to the procedure for accessing articles in the OJS. In this same message, reviewers are informed of the expected time period and proposed deadline for the review, approximately one month after a reviewer agrees to conduct the evaluation. It is the hope to always conduct the peer reviews in a timely fashion; nevertheless, adjustments may be made to ensure reviewers' participation.

In order to carry out the evaluation, peer reviewers complete the evaluation form, and in this way, recommend the article for publication or not as well as specifications for revision, if this is recommended. The results of this evaluation serve as input for the Editor and Editorial Committee to decide if the article is publishable, publishable with minor adjustments, publishable with major adjustments, or not publishable.

Once the evaluation is complete, the Editor communicates with the author(s) and informs them of the decision that has been made, indicating whether or not the article will continue in the revision process. Authors have a one-month period to adjust the article and send the revision once again to the Editor. The Editor then reviews the article and reaches the final decision as to whether the revised version will be accepted for publication, bearing in mind its revision according to the input received from the peer reviewers, and the Editor's own independent criteria.

The Editorial Committee will decide on the publication of an article according to the following criteria: the fulfillment of the above stated conditions, methodological and conceptual rigor, originality, scientific quality, and relevance.

If the article is accepted for publication, the Editor proceeds with the editing and proofreading process. Once the final version of the article is completed, it is sent to the author for final approval, and is then forwarded to the design team for its preparation.

### Relinquishing of Rights and Distribution of Published Material

The publication of articles in GIST implies that authors relinquish all rights to the article and its content. Authors also authorize GIST to promote and distribute the article via the means it deems appropriate, be it in print or electronically. For this purpose, authors should sign and send both the letter of relinquishment, and the declaration of conflict of interest upon submission of the article. These formats are available in the OJS platform of the Journal.

### Code of Ethics and Good Practices

The Editorial Committee of GiST Education and Learning Research Journal, as part of its commitment to the scientific community, strives to guarantee the ethics and quality of its articles. The publication takes the code of conduct and good practice of the Committee of Ethics in Publications (COPE) as its point of reference, which defines standards for editors of scientific journals, as well as the legal and ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the sixth edition of its Style Manual.

All parties involved in the publication of the journal (Editor, Committees, Authors, and Peer Reviewers) must accept and adhere to the ethical guidelines and principles outlined here.

### Editor Obligations and General Responsibilities

The Editor of the journal is responsible for ensuring strict compliance with the policies and principles of the journal. Specifically, the Editor is expected to act in an ethical manner in the following aspects:

**Decision making.** The Editor guides all decisions regarding articles submitted and published according to verifiable criteria of impartiality and fairness, taking into consideration the primary objectives of the journal.

The works submitted are evaluated objectively, based solely on the scientific merit of their content, without discrimination in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnic background, nationality or political persuasion.

**Confidentiality.** The Editor is committed to the principle of confidentiality and anonymity in communications between Editor and Authors, and Editor and Peer Evaluators. The Editor shall not disclose information related to the article or its process with third parties or colleagues not related to the journal, except in cases when an

expert opinion is required, and in which the express permission for this purpose is granted by the author(s). The Editor shall not use the results of research of articles not accepted for publication for his or her own benefit or that of others, except with express permission from the author(s).

**Communication.** The Editor shall receive and respond to complaints, petitions, and comments in a reasonable amount of time. This also applies to the publication of corrections or modifications stemming from the editing process of published articles.

**Compliance.** The Editor strives to comply with the editorial policies of the Journal, and the publication of each online and print issue according to its established publication schedule.

In the same fashion, to:

- Consult the opinion of the members of the Editorial Board and Committee.
- Generate initiatives of support and constantly improve editorial practices.
- Support initiatives to educate researchers on issues of publication ethics and other ethical aspects of the journal.
- Take responsibility for the process of all articles submitted to the Journal, and develop mechanisms of confidentiality and peer evaluation up to the point of publication or rejection by the journal.

Other principles to follow include:

**Peer Review Process and Editorial Decisions.** The decision to publish or not shall be established via the process of peer evaluation, according to the "double blind" method in order to guarantee that the evaluation process that is free of conflict of interest between the parties. This rigorous procedure allows peer reviewers to value the technical quality, originality, and scientific contribution of the articles, among other aspects, and at the same time provides authors with the means to improve the article. For this revision process, a sufficient number of peer reviewers will be provided, selected from qualified area experts, with the intention of allowing for a more critical, expert, and objective editorial decision- making process.

**Editing and Publication Schedule.** The Editor provides for the fulfillment of the editing and publication schedule of articles accepted for publication. Upon the publication of each issue, the Editor and the editorial team accept responsibility for the promotion and distribution of the journal to its readers, subscribers, authors, peer reviewers, and other organizations with whom the institution holds agreements, as well as the data bases and national and international indexing services.

**General Editor Obligations and Responsibilities**

Authors must present their articles in the link indicated on the OJS-web page, according to the guidelines for the presentation of articles established by the journal. Authors are responsible for the ideas expressed in the articles, and for the ethical appropriateness.

**Originality, plagiarism and exclusivity.** Authors must explicitly state that the article is original in its creation, and that every effort has been taken to respect the intellectual

property of those third parties cited within. Articles must not be reprints, nor published in other journals. Further, authors must declare that the findings are original in nature, that no plagiarism exists, nor distortion or manipulation of the facts.

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**Citations and references.** Authors must ensure that they have received express permission for the use of material they do not own, including the reproduction of charts, graphs, maps, diagrams, photographs, etc. All sources must be cited appropriately, with complete references provided.

**Authorship.** Articles with more than one author should order authors' names in hierarchical fashion, indicating by this the degree of function, responsibility, and contribution to the article. By the same token, mention must be made to any individuals who have made significant scientific or intellectual contributions to the research, composition, and editing of the article.

**Responsibility.** All authors submitting articles must assume full responsibility for their work, and ensure that it presents an exhaustive review and discussion of the most recent and relevant literature.

**Research ethics.** Research studies must use methodology that ensures that subjects are treated with respect and dignity. In addition to those principles of the code of conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA), GIST highlights the following: discussion of the limitations of confidentiality and the safekeeping of the same, minimization of the intrusion and invasiveness in individuals' privacy, conservation of data and informed consent to research, record, or film. Further, the names of institutions or individuals should be avoided, even if the author has gained permission for their use. If their mention is considered necessary, the author must submit signed authorization for their inclusion. The names of the researchers and participants shall likewise be omitted from the article. It is suggested that authors use pseudonyms, for example in case studies.

**Conflict of interest.** The Editor shall not consider articles that possibly represent a real or potential conflict of interest, resulting from financial or other relationships of competition or collaboration between authors, companies, or institutions mentioned in the article.

**Errors in articles published.** Any error or imprecision shall be communicated by the editorial team, and the necessary corrections in the online version of the article made.

**Obligations and General Responsibilities of Peer Reviewers:**

In the revision process, peer reviewers shall adhere to the following principles:

**Confidentiality.** Peer reviewers shall not share any information with third parties related to the article or its publication process. In such case that an external opinion may be necessary, reviewers shall seek express written authorization from the Editor in Chief, explaining the reasons. By the same token, reviewers shall not use the content of non-published articles for their own benefit or that of others, except with the express

authorization of the authors. The violation of the principle of confidentiality constitutes bad practice by the reviewers.

**Contribution to quality.** Individuals who commit to evaluating articles submitted to the Journal shall carry out a critical revision, without bias, using clear, non-offensive language, with the intention of guaranteeing scientific and literary quality, according to the area of expertise.

**Time management.** Although the Journal has a maximum time allotted for the revision process, articles should be evaluated as soon as possible in the hopes of optimizing the revision and editing process. At the same time, peer reviewers who feel that they are unable to fulfill their function as evaluators, either because of lack of expertise, time or possible conflict of interest, shall communicate this immediately to the Editor or editorial team through regular channels.

**Detection of errors and bad editorial practices.** Reviewers shall pay particular attention to gaps in references to literature or authors that they feel need to be included. At the same time, if in the process of revision, it is possible to detect bad practices on the part of authors, peer reviewers are under the obligation to inform the Editor so that he or she may proceed in accordance with the ethical principles of the journal.

### Additional Information

**Compensation**. The author will receive three copies of the edition in which his/her article shall appear.

**Concerns.** Communicate with the Editor through e-mail or by telephone, please. Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana, International: (57-1) 281-1777 ext. 1296; In Colombia: (05-1) 281-1777 ext.1296

**Waiver.** Every article shall be subject to the review of the Editorial Committee. The Editor reserves the right to make formal modifications to articles through the editing process.

**Editorial Norms.** The contents of the articles are the exclusive responsibility of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GiST or ÚNICA. Any article published in GiST may be quoted as long as the source is clearly referenced.

**Correspondence.** For contributions, subscriptions or journal exchanges please write to: GiST Journal, Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana ÚNICA, Calle 19 # 2A -49 Bogotá, Colombia. PBX: (57-1)2811777 email: gist@unica.edu.co http://www.unica.edu.co

# Reviewers

No. 26 (January - June 2023)

Gist would like to thank the following reviewers for their valuable comments and thoughtful revision:

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PROGRAMA CON ACREDITACIÓN DE ALTA CALIDAD

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