



Teachers across Pandemic Times: Unpacking In-Service English Language Teacher-Educators' Traces of Professional Identities

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Abstract

This study explored the complex identity development of initial teacher-educators, particularly those transitioning from high school English teaching to EFL teacher-education roles. This transition involved significant pedagogical challenges and emotional tensions, leading to a continuous process of identity [de]construction and reconstruction. While research highlights the competencies required for teacher-educators, a consensus on specific content knowledge and its practical application remains elusive. Many initial teacher-educators, despite strong practical knowledge from secondary education, struggle to transpose this to student-teacher preparation. This paper, inspired by narrative inquiry from a macro research project, documented the lived experiences and perceptions of two initial teacher-educators in an English and French undergraduate program in the Caribbean region of Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted ontological, epistemological, and methodological changes in the participants' pedagogical decisions. Findings suggest that initial teacher-educator identity development is a challenging, self-directed process, often relying on prior experience and academic credentials. Beyond pedagogical and research skills, a crucial need exists for enhancing sociocultural awareness, teaching and learning environments, and social justice commitment, especially within the unique socio-political context of Colombia.

Keywords: identity, pandemic, SLATE, teacher-educator, teaching practicum

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Profesores en tiempos de pandemia: Develando identidades profesionales en profesores-educadores de inglés en servicio

Resumen

Este estudio buscó explorar el desarrollo complejo de la identidad de los docentes de formación inicial, en particular de aquellos en transición de la docencia de inglés en secundaria a la formación de docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés). Esta transición implicó importantes desafíos pedagógicos y tensiones emocionales, lo que condujo a un proceso continuo de [de]construcción y reconstrucción de la identidad. Si bien la investigación destaca las competencias requeridas para los docentes de formación inicial, aún no se ha alcanzado un consenso sobre el conocimiento específico del contenido y su aplicación práctica. Muchos docentes de formación inicial, a pesar de poseer sólidos conocimientos prácticos adquiridos en secundaria, tienen dificultades para aplicarlos en la preparación de docentes en formación. Este artículo, inspirado en la indagación narrativa de un macroproyecto de investigación, documentó las experiencias y percepciones de dos docentes de formación inicial en un programa de pregrado de inglés y francés en la región del Caribe colombiano durante la pandemia de COVID-19, la cual condujo a un cambio onto-epistemológico y metodológico de cara a las decisiones pedagógicas de los participantes. Los hallazgos sugieren que el desarrollo de la identidad del docente de formación inicial es un proceso desafiante y autodirigido, que a menudo se basa en la experiencia previa y las credenciales académicas. Más allá de las habilidades pedagógicas y de investigación, existe una necesidad crucial de mejorar la conciencia sociocultural, los entornos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, y el compromiso con la justicia social, especialmente en el contexto sociopolítico singular de Colombia.

Palabras clave: docente-educador, formación de docentes de segundas lenguas, identidad, pandemia, práctica profesional

Introduction

Coming to terms with being a high school English teacher and then becoming a teacher-educator in EFL settings has been researched in several EFL contexts ([Ang & Amott, 2020](#); [Kanno & Stuart, 2011](#); [Murray & Male, 2005](#)). During the teacher-educators' first years, their identity development becomes a complex process where their assumptions and agencies are being continuously shaped and reshaped in interaction with their student-teachers, as well as in the social, cultural, political, and academic milieu. In their early years, some of them have often come to experience pedagogical challenges, while others endure emotional tensions, causing them anxiety and stress. The pedagogical challenges they encounter often become identity [de]construction and reconstruction processes of their new teacher-educator identities.

Beyond this, initial teacher-educator identity construction requires ongoing and reflective inquiry into who a teacher-educator is, what competencies a teacher-educator needs to develop, and what roles a teacher-educator needs to perform. Additionally, their identity construction process also considers how a teacher-educator uses their professional challenges and identity dilemmas to develop their own identity, and the way they question their pedagogical assumptions and subjective interpretations concerning the teaching context and their theoretical and practical knowledge of their professional field. While doing so, initial teacher-educators' identities become a complex challenge to juggle in their first years.

Studies on second language teacher education (SLATE) have also inquired about the competencies a teacher educator should develop, but there is no clear consensus on what content knowledge teacher-educators need to develop and how and why this knowledge can be [re]configured into practical knowledge. In connection with this, [Johnson \(2013\)](#) underlines that there is a need to close the gap between theory and practice since both are fundamental for teacher educator development. Concerning initial teacher-educators, although many of them have developed practical knowledge in the secondary education context, they often find difficulties in transposing their pedagogical and practical knowledge in preparing student-teachers for the world of teaching in different contexts ([Wood & Borg, 2010](#)). This is not far from Colombia's reality, where the transition of secondary to tertiary education levels influences teachers-turned-professors' pedagogical content knowledge, sensitivity, and decision-making about their didactic and pedagogical orientations. This situation was further [co]amplified by unfamiliar scenarios such as remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led newly appointed teacher-educators to challenge their pedagogical practices and question their positionings.

In this regard, the requirements for becoming a teacher-educator encompass a series of competencies such as model teaching, research and scholarship, leadership in the profession, and ongoing professional development ([Smith, 2003](#)) that were challenged during the pandemic in the context where this research was conducted. In that line, a key element that favors this transposition process is the continuous teacher-educator pedagogical reflective awareness of knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of the practice ([Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999](#)). The mindful awareness of such types of knowledge increases the affordances of teacher identity development processes.

Bearing that in mind, in this study, I intended to explore the way two initial teacher-educators have been constructing their teacher-educator identities in an English and French undergraduate program in the Caribbean region of Colombia. Inspired by narrative inquiry, I documented these two teacher-educators' initial identities by understanding their lived experiences, their narratives, and their perceptions. I also explored the way they have been making themselves visible as teachers who educate future teachers by considering assumptions of their identity development process in their first years as teacher-educators.

Accordingly, I bring to the discussion that initial educator identity development is a challenging process ([Hernández, 2025](#)) since teacher-educators usually have to figure out their own professional and pedagogical path through trial, error, and reflection. They mainly rely on their previous teaching experiences and

academic credentials and titles to take up this complex responsibility to navigate tertiary education levels. In addition to pedagogical knowledge and research skills, they also need to enhance their sociocultural awareness, commitment to social justice, and peace. There is a need then to deeply inquire into the way Colombian initial teacher-educators develop their identities, considering the social, political, and economic reality of the country.

Theoretical Foundations

Coming to Terms with Teacher-Educator Identity

Teacher educators are envisioned as professionals who assist students in developing pedagogical competence and critical reflection on teaching and learning processes, and who also foster pre-service teachers' actions and attitudes towards becoming qualified in-service teachers ([Koster et al., 2005](#)). In terms of teacher educators' identity construction processes, [Kreber \(2010\)](#) affirms that such construction can be described as ongoing and complex changes, since teacher educators constantly [re]shape their identity considering their personal theories of teaching, their perceptions of the self, interrelations with other colleagues and students, as well as the sociocultural traits of their teaching contexts.

Hence, exploring the identity construction processes of teacher educators comprises aspects of teacher-educators' pedagogy that go beyond their classroom work, for instance, as teacher-educators are part of a cultural and political national context, their identity construction process is shaped in part by the rights and duties that the political and cultural context demands, and the challenges and tensions they have experienced before, during, and after the teaching and learning processes. From the above, it can be underlined that a teacher-educator's identity entails a challenging interconnectedness of cognitive, reflexive, affective, critical, socio-cultural, and political processes and decisions enacted through their discourse, pedagogical contingencies, and research skills that they display in class and their professional field.

Unpacking Teacher-Educators' Professional Identity

Teacher-educators' identity construction processes inherently relate to their professional identity; it is then imperative to consider their professional identity as a continuous development process based on their reflective interpretation and reinterpretation of their teaching experience ([Beijaard et al., 2004](#)). Moreover, professional teacher-educators develop their identity through the way they experience the real-world challenges and emotional tensions that emerge in their profession. Therefore, teachers should be provided with opportunities to become agents of their professional development processes, have awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the contingencies of their community of practice and their social, historical, and political context ([Beijaard et al., 2004](#)).

Teacher-educators as teachers of future teachers consciously, or unconsciously, serve as a model for future teachers. The way they teach influences their students' learning and motivation. They should base their teaching practice on sound research principles. Concerning this, [Lunenberg et al. \(2007\)](#) highlight that modeling should be a conscious process to deconstruct the teacher-educator practices. The deconstruction processes can favor the improvement of their teaching processes, may also favor change and pedagogical innovation in their teaching practice, and may contribute to raising students' awareness about their future professional development. Another key aspect in a teacher-educator's identity development is their role as a researcher, since research becomes one of the major tools for their professional development and teaching practice. The process of doing research not only helps them improve their research knowledge and skills, but also motivates student-teachers to do research.

Welcoming Teacher-Educators' Notion of Agency

Every time teacher-educators negotiate their identities in their professional context, they are exercising their agency to create and transform their work practice. The challenges, constraints, and opportunities they experience can become sources of agency towards professional development and negotiation of their professional identity. [Eteläpelto et al. \(2015\)](#) state that “professional agency is understood to exist when subjects’ agency is directed at work-related phenomena, and when they influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities” (p. 662). From here, it can be stated that teacher-educators influence their student-teachers and their teaching context by the positioning they take up and the choices they make to affect their work and their professional identity in their sociocultural context. Teacher-educators’ professional agency and identity can be inferred from their professional commitments, motivations, and goals, as well as their display of professional knowledge and competencies, along with their working history.

Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach. [Kothari \(2004\)](#) describes this paradigm as the need to understand subjects and objects, along with their realizations, as entities evolving in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret different phenomena in different multidimensional spaces. This research aimed to explore initial in-service teacher educators’ identity construction processes to understand the multiple factors that contributed to that construction and development. This paper also focused on grounding a descriptive and interpretive dimension to document and challenge teacher-educators’ identities while reflecting upon their teacher doings.

Beyond this, this paper draws on narratives. [Clandinin and Connelly \(2000\)](#) express that narrations stand as a path to understanding experience. They focus on documenting a human’s lived experiences to explore and describe human interaction in multiple scenarios that consider having stories and experiences as the core of each of them ([Hernández, 2025](#)). In connection with this, [De Fina and Georgakopoulou \(2011\)](#) underline that narrations bring “stories and storytelling as a methodological tool to investigate individual and group experiences and identities” (p. 1). In the same vein, narrative analysis processes set the ground for the analytical criteria to explore and describe, but also to understand and comprehend the dimensions of teacher-educators’ lived experiences.

In terms of data construction ([Ubaque-Casallas & Castañeda-Peña, 2021](#)), I assumed an ontological perspective that attempted to co-construct data from teacher-educators’ narratives to document their identity construction processes all along their journeys of teaching, sensing, and living. To do so, guided autobiographies and interviews were used to understand the multiple processes and factors of teacher-educators’ ongoing identity construction processes. Concerning their autobiography writing, participants were provided with a framework with some key prompts related to their language learning processes, language learning experiences at secondary and tertiary level, teaching practices and experiences as high school teachers and teacher educators, language teaching assumptions, and teaching dilemmas and pedagogical challenges; the same prompts guided the interviews, which aimed to explore those narratives in depth.

I configured the data into storylines and turned them into two separate stories to be transcribed and translated for the purposes of this paper. The deconstruction and reconstruction process of the data through chunks helped me gain a deeper understanding and meaning making of the participants’ identity construction process. After this, I approached commonalities and differences based on thematic units following open and axial coding interpretation, which allowed me to gain initial insight into the emerging and latent conflicts and challenges, to then build up the categories that shed some light on the descriptions teacher-educators generated through their narratives. Therefore, I reconstructed both the autobiographies and the interviews by bonding them through narrative logic and meaning making using a matrix that considered space, time, and social relations ([Clandinin & Connelly, 2000](#)). To stay trustworthy, I asked the participants to member-check the co-constructed stories and made complementary comments on them.

After the co-constructed storylines were revisited, narratives were reconstructed based on the deconstruction of each segment in the matrix. As the matrix included an insight into each segment, viewed from the dimensions of time, space, and social relations, as well as my interpretation of the storyline, I could merge all the chunks through narrative writing, which resulted in an organized set of stories. Additionally, having included my interpretation section in the matrix helped me understand my locus of enunciation by positioning myself as a companion and not as an extractor of information, which helped me during the data construction phase.

Context and participants

This research took place in an English and French undergraduate program at a public university in the Caribbean region of Colombia, with two male initial teacher-educators whose names were changed to protect their identities. The first one, Luis, was born in Bogotá, Colombia. He lived in the USA in his early childhood and did military service in the Sinai due to his competence in the English language. He has been teaching English for twenty years and has finished an undergraduate program in EFL teaching. Luis refers to himself as a human being committed to knowing more as he delves into the higher education field and characterizes himself as a person who is in continuous change. He has eventually invested his knowledge and passion in getting prepared for teaching at different levels.

In the same vein, David is a novice teacher-educator born in Montería, Colombia. He holds an undergraduate degree in EFL teaching and a master's degree in education. David defines himself as a person willing to understand his colleagues and students by not only looking at the process of teaching content knowledge but also paying attention to his students' socio-affective characteristics and emotional intelligence. David mentions he is an engaged, reflective teacher committed to his pedagogical agency processes. He is looking forward to understanding how to be a better professional and better citizen. David considers that one of the most important features that defines him as a teacher-educator, beyond teaching at the tertiary level, is his passion to foster social justice in teenagers so that they empower themselves both locally and globally. Importantly, Luis's and David's narratives reflect the intentionality of this project, as their range is unbalanced. This means that David's novice notion of being a teacher-educator was reduced in comparison with Luis's teaching experience. Therefore, the depth of the analysis was tied to the amount of data that was made visible through the autobiography instrument and during the interviews.

Findings

This findings section is organized by participant; that is, the results are presented according to Luis and David's singularities and particularities as initial teacher-educators. This is done after an ontological reflection that guided me to illustrate factors and contributions around their identity construction processes to gain a better insight into the teaching panorama in terms of knowledge, challenges, and constraints that were better situated in a separate section that I called discussion, to let stories shine first, to then analyze their background and provide interpretations for each solid narrative. The narratives below are the reconstruction of the interviews and autobiographies merged. For better reach, all narrative excerpts were translated. Importantly, Luis's and David's narratives reflect the intentionality of this project, as their range is unbalanced. This means that David's novice notion of being a teacher-educator was reduced in comparison with Luis's teaching experience. Therefore, the depth of the analysis was tied to the amount of data that was made visible through the autobiography instrument and during the interviews.

Luis's experiences around teaching: English language teacher by accident and "the real site of struggle" Luis's main professional purpose was to become a civil engineer since engineering had been his life passion. However, life took him to become an English teacher in a private school. He assumed his initial teaching process as a challenge and a learning experience. Regarding this, he affirmed:

Teaching in a private school is a very complex process. It's necessary to find pedagogical strategies to motivate students to learn English and thus change their perceptions about English being an obligation. However, I decided to accept the challenge of becoming a teacher because it was an opportunity to share my knowledge of English as a global competence.

In this private school, he often noticed that his students and even the administrative staff gave him differential treatment with respect to his colleagues because he had learned English in the United States and had traveled abroad:

At this private school, many students were well-off and looked down on the teachers. But I was treated differently because I had lived abroad and had a life story abroad. Even the administrators looked at me differently because I had had international experience... and I used this as a pedagogical advantage to engage my students in learning English.

Luis took advantage of his cultural capital to position himself above his colleagues and his students. He positioned himself as someone who had a good English level and could perform well as an English teacher. His identity, as an initial English teacher, was accrued by his self-efficacy perception of his linguistic and cultural command of this language, and the way the students and the school staff reaffirmed his self-perception. After some years of teaching in a private high school, Luis ventured to teach English in language institutes at the university level. He improved his teaching skills by favoring a communicative pedagogy in his classes. He also attended several teacher development courses that enriched his pedagogical resources. All this teaching experience paved the way to enroll in and finish an English undergraduate program in a virtual university. From then on, Luis's connection with his novice self-as-teacher notion drove him to alternatively engage in elaborated ways of transforming his gained [situated] knowledge on English. Therefore, the connection with his identity, moving from speaker to teacher of the language, influenced his agency as a novice English teacher, which contributed to reaffirming his commitment to teaching English globally.

In connection with this, Luis also stated that *"I had a lot of experience teaching English and went to university to validate my skills. However, I learned a lot, especially in the practicum, where I had to interact virtually with my teachers and students. This was a different experience than what I'd had in face-to-face settings."* There seem to be some tendencies in Luis to give more emphasis to his empirical teaching experience and assume his formal educational experience as complementary. This helps construct his identity as an English teacher positioning his agency as a teacher of the language on the empirical way of understanding and sharing the language. At this point, knowledge was a source held back by his experience in terms of qualifications to make impact on curriculum design in the sense that his cultural awareness contributed to the decision-making of the tasks selected in his classes

Becoming a teacher educator

After some years of working in a language institute at the tertiary level, Luis was offered a job opportunity to work as an English teacher in an English and French undergraduate program. This job opportunity became a new challenge and a new learning opportunity for him. He received this teaching post with great expectations and commitment by saying that *"becoming a teacher-educator made me give my best personally and professionally."* He started teaching in this program in the first semester of 2020. He taught face-to-face for a month and a half before the outbreak of COVID-19, then he had to engage in remote teaching. He was assigned two academic subjects: Practicum 1, where he had to organize and assign the students to schools to do their teaching practicum, and Academic Writing, where the students had to develop academic writing skills and produce mainly academic essays. In the second semester, he was assigned general English and Sociolinguistics. He considered all these teaching experiences meaningful and successful. Considering it, moving from the quietude to a site of struggle made him realize the multiplicity of teaching experiences and negotiations that interwove his pedagogical content knowledge with his empirical way of perceiving the teaching of English or using the English language to teach.

Becoming a reflective teacher-educator and a mentor

In the next semester, Luis worked as a teacher-educator; he was assigned three subjects to teach: Academic Writing, Communication Theory, English A1, also was granted the role of Teaching Practicum advisor. He highlighted that his experience in Communication Theory and as a Practicum advisor were significant for his teacher educator development process since he became aware of the importance of reflection and mentoring as a teacher educator. He highlighted that:

Communication theory was a very interesting challenge. When I saw the syllabus, I immediately thought it was a boring course. I realized it was too abstract, and students had few opportunities to put the knowledge into practice. Therefore, I decided to apply it more to their own lives and told the students they were going to create their own communication theory and draw that theory from their own everyday lives. At the end of the course, they created 32 microtheories about lexicon, dialects, and idiolects and gave oral presentations on their microtheories.

Regarding his Teaching Practicum advisor's involvement, he became aware of the importance of re-searching to update his pedagogical knowledge since this was his first experience as an advisor. The diverse pedagogical demands that the Practicum students made on him took him to do research to support the students' contingencies during their Practicum. In connection with this, he underlines: *"When I first started advising students in practice, although I had considerable knowledge, I had to review many things about pedagogy and methodology because I didn't know the kinds of problems students might face in their practice. When I'm teaching students who are about to finish their degree, like those in the Practicum, I have to make a mental shift because I'm interacting with future colleagues who are knowledgeable about teaching and have their professional goals."*

Since Luis has been working as a Teaching Practicum advisor for more than three semesters now, this teaching and learning experience has favored his reflective teaching skills in teaching A1 and A2 English at the beginning of his career. He has become more aware of developing pedagogical reflection in his students: *"Although students take Teaching Methods and Didactics courses after the fourth semester, I usually ask students to evaluate my classes. I ask them questions like: How was the class today? What did you understand? What didn't you understand? Did you like the material? After they answer these questions, I tell them they should do something like this when they're working as teachers to monitor the quality of their teaching."* These types of reflective questions promote students' pedagogical awareness and, to a certain extent, instances of imagined identities as future language teachers.

In a similar vein, Luis also started developing his skills and identity as a mentor due to his involvement as a practicum advisor: *"I've always felt comfortable giving advice, and I believe I've always been a good advisor, and that's why I felt comfortable in the Practicum... It's been very important for me to share my knowledge and what I've read with these students since then. In the end, it's been beneficial for me and my students... I think I'll be able to do even better in the coming semesters. One of my goals as a teacher has been to offer support to my students, that is, to guide them not in an encyclopedic way, but as a support or a guiding light."* His mentoring process has also helped Luis become more aware of the sociocultural reality of the students in this program, since his teaching experience had mainly been with students from high socioeconomic backgrounds. With respect to this, Luis stated that:

Most of the students in this program come from very humble backgrounds and are low-income. We need to understand them and how they behave. Many students lack public services like electricity, internet, and water, and we need to understand their situation. This has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where I have become aware of the difficult economic situation many students and their families are facing. This situation has led me to create a more humanistic interaction with my students, an aspect I had barely noticed before working on this program because I had been working with students from middle and upper-class backgrounds.

Becoming a remote learning teacher-educator: Facing challenges

Luis has often assumed new or unexpected challenges as learning opportunities. It could be said that Luis's pedagogical competence has been accrued through the new pedagogical experiences he has engaged in. His agency and investment in learning new perspectives have made him versatile and competent on

many occasions regarding the teaching of English. Luis felt that his transition from face-to-face learning to remote learning was smooth since he had been exposed to online learning environments before and had developed online pedagogical skills. However, his teaching challenges were at two levels: the first one was the socioeconomic situations his students and the students' families were living in, which affected their class attendance, and the second was the Teaching Practicum in a remote learning environment. Both challenges represented a pedagogical conundrum for the students, and Luis had to find ways to support the students in the new remote learning environment. He claimed that:

The students asked me, 'How do I do it?' because I had everything planned for in-person learning. Now I have to do it virtually, and it turns out they don't have connectivity or a computer. So, I started offering them options, opportunities, and possibilities. That was also important for us to realize that not everything was as we had planned from the beginning.

In this storyline, we can observe both the students' challenges to develop their Practicum and the new teaching scenario Luis was facing as a teacher educator. As a consequence, he had to engage in pedagogical reflections to contemplate new pedagogical possibilities to meet the pedagogical contingencies he was facing, representing a roller coaster of knowledge and emotions in the process. He stated:

How do we ensure that these kids have a truly educational experience? What do I do today? Because up until then, it was simply a didactic process of creating materials without knowing what happened to that material. Then, another concept came into play that seemed very interesting to me, and that was the concept of learning to manage changes in plans, beginning to understand how great that in this area of pedagogy, there is an important topic, which is direct interaction with students, but that in one way or another, education is tending towards virtuality, and teachers have to learn to teach virtually. So, that challenge prompted me to begin creating a series of workshops on creating materials using virtual tools for kids.

In this storyline, it may be seen that Luis's pedagogical concern is about meeting the learning outcome of the Teaching Practicum and, at the same time, his agency in finding new pedagogical possibilities for his students in this new teaching scenario. About this experience, he highlighted the following:

Having dedicated myself to generating these opportunities for change in the course structure allowed me to realize that students not only need to be prepared for in-person learning, but also for any change they may face. To go to a rural school where there's no blended learning available, they need to have the tools for that type of situation. We're not immune to another strike, nor are we immune to a new pandemic.

Luis also recognized the importance of developing remote learning pedagogical skills in his students so that they can leverage the integration of digital literacies and tools as pedagogical resources to meet the new generation's literacy competencies. He also recognized how the students who were doing the Practicum informed him pedagogically about creative ways of integrating technology into their teaching.

Looking at their lesson plans led me to understand some things. Perhaps seeing the status of other online resources, I know but don't use makes me curious about how they're being used, and that also changes my behavior. Also, the materials they're using, and since they're younger, that gives them the opportunity to design materials that reflect what they're seeing in their own reality and help you contextualize the students you're teaching.

The contingencies that the COVID-19 pandemic brought into Luis's identity development process showed the way the contextual teaching situations triggered his agency in exploring new pedagogical identity construction processes. For instance, Luis became more aware of the way his students' socioeconomic conditions and the way digital pedagogical creativity transformed his educator identity. In addition, Luis's pedagogical discourse about remote learning also indexes the way he was expanding his teacher pedagogical knowledge and teacher educator identity.

Along with this narrative, we can observe that Luis has become a teacher due to his cultural capital of the English language and a fortuitous job offer he was given. He has developed his teaching identity and agency mostly through his experiential engagement with teaching English and his pragmatic teaching assumptions. He stressed his identity as someone who acquired the English language in the USA, an aspect that favored the way school staff and students positioned him differently from the local English teachers, who had not been abroad. He has also become more conscious of the students' needs and socioeconomic

reality. The challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed to his identity development process have also extended his pedagogical knowledge repertoire in terms of developing a teacher educator's remote literacy pedagogies and learning from the students' pedagogical creativity in the Practicum. Likewise, his experience as Practicum advisor and coordinator of the Teaching Practicum has also favored his pedagogical transformational processes in other courses he has been teaching.

David's narratives about teaching: *Ups and downs as a student teacher and "placing a new teacher-educator on the track"* David decided to become an EFL teacher, motivated by the language proficiency he had developed during high school. His awareness of being good at English made him enroll in an English program: *"At school, in 11th grade, I realized I was doing really well in English, and I did well in my subjects because I was diligent, not because I liked them. However, with English, it was different. I looked forward to that class because I felt good. When I was deciding on a major, I chose English."* However, during the first semester, he felt unmotivated to continue studying because he had never considered becoming a teacher. In connection with this, he underlined: *"I was disappointed with what I was achieving in my degree, because I was unmotivated in the sense that I didn't identify with being a teacher."*

Although David had identified himself as someone who wanted to speak the English language in the first semesters of his program, it was not until the sixth semester that he started to consider the possibility of becoming an English teacher. Two key factors influenced his initial teacher identity: The first one was a professor who used a dialogic pedagogy in his classes and who had a strong impact on David's pedagogy. He claimed:

I remembered what one of my professors' classes was. We didn't just read; he gave the students space to express themselves and participate. I do something similar in all my classes: I listen to the students; I don't just explain a topic. I emphasize that aspect a lot. In my class, I rely heavily on the teaching methods the professor used.

The second factor was the teacher's attitudes toward his students, colleagues, and the rest of his co-workers. David underlines that human values, politeness, kindness, and humility are fundamental qualities of a good teacher. Similarly, he thinks that these characteristics go beyond any academic achievement because having such humanistic features allows educators to humbly learn from their students. He stated that *"knowing that sometimes you learn from the students. For example, in PPI2 I learned that I don't know everything."* From the previous assertion, we can notice the way David's initial identity development processes were the interplay of intrinsic motivation, contextual interaction with teacher educators who enact authentic and meaningful pedagogies, and who became pedagogical models for him.

Embracing imagined identities as a Student-Teacher

David's teaching identity began to take shape during his undergraduate studies when a research-methods teacher engaged him in a reflective pedagogical process mediated by research tasks. This teaching experience made a dent in his teacher identity since the teacher's methodology conjoined, for him, many of the fundamental characteristics of a good teacher. This teacher was kind, motivating, and creative, and became an imaginary pedagogical model for David. As such, he stated: *"So, Professor Juan was assigned to us as a research professor, and I developed a love for teaching thanks to his classes. The role model I want to be for my students is based on what I learned from him. I told myself if I ever became half as good a teacher as Juan, I'd consider myself well served."*

During his teaching practicum, David received meaningful, tactful feedback from his cooperating teacher, who helped him reconsider his current beliefs about language teaching and learning in a public high school. She helped him become more conscious of the public school's context as well as the students' socioeconomic situation. The way the cooperating teacher supported him pedagogically and emotionally favored his willingness to receive feedback on classroom management, didactics, and teaching material adaptation. Related to this, he remarked: *"At the Normal Superior de Montería, I remember that I had a cooperating teacher who was a sweetheart; she advised me, did the things that my advisor didn't do, and paid more attention to the feedback she gave me."*

David also underlined that a kindhearted and considerate cooperating teacher is fundamental for the development of Practicum students' identity as future teachers, since it is often a stressful experience for a student doing the Teaching Practicum. In a similar vein, David perceived teaching as an ongoing improvement since English teachers are frequently reflecting and assessing their teaching principles, their didactics, and pedagogy to improve their teaching practice. For instance, he recognized that he has expanded his pedagogical resources and changed his teaching practice due to the competences he has gained from doing a master's in education: *"I've learned to assess my students' reading comprehension with hyperdocs through project-based learning, which is my master's research topic."* This has positively impacted the way he has been exercising his agency as a teacher of English, which has also impacted his identity as a speaker of the foreign language and a professor who uses English to teach content.

"Where a thousand things could have gone right and a million wrong, everything went well."

After he finished his degree, David worked as an English teacher at a university corporation. Most of the pedagogical resources he initially used as a teacher came from the imagined identity he had created from his previous teacher educators. Some of them were positive, such as the ones already mentioned, but others were discouraging. However, he used both experiences as pedagogical tools to develop his initial identity as a language teacher. In 2018, he was offered a job at a university. He started teaching a B2 English course at the language school of this university. In this working environment, he experienced working with scarce pedagogical resources, which made him resignify his pedagogical teaching identity and praxis. In doing so, he affirmed:

The change was drastic. I went from having everything I needed to teach a class to realizing it wasn't that simple. That year was when I realized I was in a comfort zone because I was always 100% dependent on the slides. 2018 was like discovering myself as a teacher because I learned how hard it is to design materials again. So, it was mainly that, realizing I was in that comfort zone... that made me explode as a teacher.

Afterwards, as a cooperating teacher, being a teacher-educator, he experienced some pedagogical challenges as well since he had to support student-teachers doing their Teaching Practicum and reconsider his pedagogical assumptions in terms of the Practicum syllabus demands and the student-teachers' personal pedagogical concerns. This appeared to be a sort of conflict since he was starting to construct his professional self as a teacher of English. He stated:

My experience as a teacher has taught me two important things: ideas for activities and very dynamic ideas from what I learned from the interns. I remember one of my interns once used Kahoot, but she didn't use it for the warm-up; rather, for the quiz itself. I questioned it, but I remembered that as an advisor, I'm not there to say no. The practice is for the student to see if it works or not. I said to myself, let's see what she does. And you know what? *Where a thousand things could have gone right and a million wrong, everything went well.*

In this excerpt, we can see David's open-minded attitude towards students' pedagogical risk-taking in the Practicum. He also recognizes how the student teachers' ideas could nurture his pedagogy and identity development process. Some of his experiences in the Practicum reaffirm his position of giving student teachers opportunities to explore pedagogical possibilities in a creative way. As such, he affirmed that: *"There are things that don't appear in a book, there are things that one simply learns being there, and the truth is that I'm going to tell you that I felt proud to see that sometimes we underestimate a little what our student-teachers can do. Sometimes one feels that one has to be breaking everything down, when that is not the case."*

Another relevant aspect is the way David nurtured his personal and professional agency in the students, giving them freedom to try out new things in order to explore their identity development processes and self-pedagogical authorship. Although David acknowledged that his previous teachers made a significant dent in his teaching identity, his personal experience with his students at the university has also contributed to his identity development process in terms of the students' innovative pedagogical experiences, as well as the university's cultural and contextual conditions.

The teacher who educates future teachers: Learning settings

Besides his understanding of what makes a good English teacher, David is also aware of the responsibilities that encompass training future teachers. For example, he remarks that even though he was not currently teaching any pedagogy subject by the time of this project, he tried to encourage students to understand the importance of learning how to teach the language by enacting the role model teacher he considers to be right, so that he can set an example for these future teachers, and by providing his pupils with some "tips" about how to teach.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic made David reconfigure his pedagogy to meet the new challenges he was facing. One aspect that opened learning opportunities for him was an ICT course that he took, where he learned to use different technological tools to teach English remotely. He stated, *"Because the platform wasn't useful to the students, I attended a training program on Hyperdocs. And project-based learning, because I chose it for my master's thesis, and also to promote reading."* He found out that hyperdocs were a useful tool to engage students academically and address their connectivity issues. Due to his good experience with hyperdocs, he decided to do his master's research on the impact of this tool on reading comprehension, and this pedagogical resource has become one of his favorite teaching resources in different courses he has been teaching. This has been favoring David's epistemologies on pedagogy and didactics, nurturing his professional agency as a teacher of English that has undergone expectations and difficulties that have challenged his professional teacher identity.

The experiences that David has gained working as an English teacher have become a significant factor that shapes the way he perceives his self and his students. When teaching English to future English teachers, he usually goes beyond teaching the language and uses his teaching enactment as a pedagogical reflective experience. In contrast, when he is teaching a general English course, he merely focuses on teaching language skills. This contrasting positioning shows how the nature of the career, the course, and the students favor the deployment of different positional identities to meet the contingencies of the context and roles teachers play in those contexts. David's teaching in private and public settings made him examine his assumptions about the students' engagement in learning concerning the object of the career, stating:

When I started teaching, I had the prejudice that since the university was private, students wanted everything for free, and that at public universities, students really put in the effort. This isn't true. At private universities, I've found students who want to learn, and at public universities, I've also found students who don't put in much effort. The biggest difference between these two universities is in the subjects I teach, because at the public university, I work with future English teachers, while at the other university, I work with students who need a level of English to graduate.

The interplay among context, participants' interaction, teacher assumptions, and socio-economic status seems to exercise a significant influence on David's identity deployment, not only because of the contingencies that emerged in such contexts, but also due to David's willingness to empower himself as a teacher educator. Along with the previous excerpts, David has shown a reflective teaching positioning as a teacher who is learning from what he experiences, affirming that: *"I have always tried to incorporate the best of my learning and teaching experiences to nurture myself as a teacher."*

Discussion

Teacher identity development is a complex determining process ([Hernández, 2025](#)) and in it, many contextual, personal, interpersonal, and professional factors favor or hinder such development. In both cases, we can see that Luis and David's previous language learning experiences and teaching practice have favored the development of their language teaching beliefs and their enactment of their identity as teacher educators, contributing to their self-as-teacher notion nurtured by their agency. Luis's initial identification process with the language was more related to his vital experience with the language. In contrast, David's process of identification of the language came more from his self-sense of competence for learning English in high school. Both teacher-educators consider that English teachers should be highly competent in English, have

pedagogical knowledge, and show human qualities ([Arrieta & Rosado, 2020](#)), interposing their situated knowledge in a vast variety of contexts that contribute to their teacher identity co-construction processes.

These pedagogical perspectives align with [Murray and Male's \(2005\)](#) findings in the sense that both subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are interdependent in [EFL] teacher education. Like Murray and Male's findings, both Luis and David have faced pedagogical struggles that have allowed them to rethink their pedagogical practice otherwise. In Luis's case, he assumed an identity position as a risk-taker, and he is always open to venturing into pedagogical endeavors. On the other hand, David assumed a more conservative attitude towards exploring new pedagogical venues, such as teaching new courses. Even though both have experienced some degree of uncertainty as initial teacher-educators, they have enacted different types of agencies in their identity constructions as initial teacher educators ([Dinkelman, 2011](#)).

Similarly, when they entered tertiary education, they started to build their teacher identity from the academic and professional experience they had gained in their previous working context. However, they had to rethink and understand their pedagogical knowledge in the higher education context due to their new role as teacher educators ([Murray & Male, 2005](#)). This new role implied learning about the pedagogical culture of the university and the Foreign Language Program, research skills, ongoing pedagogical reflection, and senior teachers' support ([Ang & Amott, 2020](#)). In the case of Luis and David, they have explored their teacher educator journey by themselves, since in our context, teachers have had scarce institutional support to accompany them in this process, as there are no pedagogical guidelines on teacher-educator competencies. This complements the limited engagement with knowledge of practice they started to develop as new teacher educators since their pedagogical content knowledge was much more mediated by empirical and relational/imaginary doings of external agencies embraced through their way of conceiving the teaching of English.

Nevertheless, there are some key aspects that have allowed them to develop pedagogical reflection, such as their role as cooperating teachers, since they had to revisit their teaching assumptions ([Hernández, 2019](#)) in the light of the Practicum students' lesson plans, class observations, and pedagogical struggles. The thinking-together process mediated by experiences and the pedagogical resources has contributed to their initial teacher identity construction process ([Golombek, 2017](#)). Otherwise, the social context has also played a role in the construction of their identities due to the limitations of the pedagogical resources and the students' cultural capital. Both participants had to reexamine their pedagogical beliefs and transform their pedagogical practices to meet the contextual needs and gaps, favoring their agency in particular ways that situate the sort of English teacher-educators they are. In connection with this, [Beijaard et al. \(2004\)](#) state that the socio-cultural, economic, and political context becomes a fundamental part of the teacher's professional identity construction process since the emotional tensions and challenges they encounter allow the examination of their teaching practice and the transformation of their professional identity.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers exercised pedagogical and social agency to meet the ongoing contingencies they had to face with their students. They became more aware of the pedagogical discomfort and socioeconomic challenges their students were experiencing. Their positionings suggest that they have experienced identity transformation processes as more socially committed teacher-educators as agents of their own professional and pedagogical development, as learners of the Practicum students' creativity, as well as of the contextual demands, which meant moving from the comfort zone and amplifying the sense of teaching to a more humanistic dimension ([Boylan & Woolsey, 2015](#)).

Conclusions

Luis and David have constructed their identity as initial teacher educators from their different personal, academic, and work sources. Their identity construction process has been a personal endeavor mediated by the contextual working contingencies that have made them reflect on pedagogical, didactic, and

humanitarian social issues they have encountered. Their initial identity construction process seemed to emerge more from a knowledge-in-practice reflection and in response to the contextual particularities of their teaching context, using their personal knowledge-for-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). However, they seem to be less concerned with using both knowledge-for-practice and knowledge-in-practice to engage in research processes and research-based findings of their knowledge-of-practice that inform both their professional and other educators' professional practices.

Ultimately, Luis and David's identities as teacher-educators reflected key concerns and uncertainties that teachers experience and undergo as evidence of scarceness and political afflictions that situate teachers in different non-being zones, alternating between their selves and their vast plural identities to unpack their singularities (Hernández, 2025). Considering that both Luis and David have been constructing their identities as teacher-educators engaged in social and human perspectives of teaching, their capability for understanding external agency negotiated through context and practice led them to rethink ways otherwise to position themselves, involving the knowledge they have about English and the way they have been perceiving English teaching in digital scenarios.

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