

Reading Identity Construction: Teacher Educator's Influence on Student-Teachers

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Abstract

This research aimed to determine the influence of language teacher educators' identity as readers on the construction of student-teachers identity as readers. Taking an ethnographic approach, researchers applied six semi-structured interviews to gather the data for this study; three of them were for teacher educators, and the other three were for student-teachers. To analyze the data, the following categories were used: (1) reading as a transformative skill, (2) reading's personal and social dimension, (3) teachers as an essential key to having success in promoting reading habits. The findings showed that reading brings many positive contributions to teachers and students because through this tool people can expand their knowledge, learn a second language in a more holistic way, better perceive their environment, and share their ideas. However, in terms of strategies, teachers must look for ways to promote reading not as a mandatory but as a purposeful activity.

Keywords: identity as readers, teacher educators, student teachers, reading strategies

Resumen

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar la influencia de la identidad de los formadores de profesores de idiomas como lectores en la construcción de la identidad de los estudiantes-profesores como lectores. Tomando un enfoque etnográfico, los investigadores aplicaron seis entrevistas semiestructuradas para recopilar los datos para este estudio; tres de ellos fueron para formadores de docentes y los otros tres fueron para estudiantes-profesores. Para analizar los datos se utilizaron las siguientes categorías: (1) la lectura como habilidad transformadora, (2) la dimensión personal y social de la lectura, (3) el docente como clave fundamental para tener éxito en la promoción de hábitos de lectura. Los hallazgos mostraron que la lectura aporta muchas contribuciones positivas a profesores y estudiantes porque a través de esta herramienta las personas pueden ampliar sus conocimientos, aprender un segundo idioma de una manera más holística, percibir mejor su entorno y compartir sus ideas. Sin embargo, en términos de estrategias, los profesores deben buscar formas de promover la lectura no como una actividad obligatoria sino como una actividad con un propósito.

Palabras clave: identidad como lectores, maestros educadores, estudiantes-profesores, estrategias de lectura.

Degree Requirement

This ethnographic research project is submitted as a requirement to graduate from the bachelor's degree in English Teaching at the School of Humanities and Education, Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, in Medellín, Colombia.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Currently, education faces many challenges in terms of the implementation of new strategies for students to develop certain life tools: adopting a critical stance in face of various contemporary problems; acquiring creative skills to contribute to the construction of knowledge; and expressing their ideas and thoughts clearly, coherently, and assertively to contribute possible solutions.

Reading has always been the fundamental instrument that the educational system has used for students to achieve these abilities, and with them meet educational demands. Nevertheless, students still have conflicts regarding reading since their attitudes show a lack of interest and motivation towards activities involving literary topics.

Therefore, teachers play an essential role in modifying these students' beliefs. Besides, teachers also have the responsibility of knowing how to integrate reading material to transcend the contents of the class. For this reason, future language student-teachers need to create a penchant for reading, given that language is the mechanism by which human beings can transmit what they know, what they think, and what they feel, that is, language represents how people perceive the world.

For the aforementioned reasons, and being student-teachers from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, with this study we sought, first, to recognize the actions in our language teacher educators' teaching practice that reflected their identity as readers, and second, to determine if their actions become referents for student-teachers so as to produce in them an inclination for reading or an intrinsic desire to be readers and in this way integrate this attribute as part of their teaching identity.

Finally, we chose the teaching population as references because "the role of TE is essential in the development of student teachers' teacher identity, and thus it is crucial to ascertain the nature of the beliefs held by student teachers during their TE training and how such beliefs change" (Izadina, 2013 as cited in Stenberg and Maaranen, 2020, p. 1).

Thereupon, if teacher educators have effective techniques to make reading a more enjoyable and accessible activity for their student-teachers, probably many students can transform their conceptions about reading.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Reading

Reading has always been one of the most important skills that students must acquire. However, a study has shown that the act of reading must point towards something more than being able to say the words that are written. For this reason, Woolley (2011) has established that: “Reading comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences” (p.15). Thereby, reading becomes a fundamental skill to become competent in the native language, because it will help students to better understand their language and what it represents for the context in which they are immersed. In addition, if reading is such an influential skill in learning a mother tongue, it is even more so for learning a second language:

Reading has a pivotal role in second language acquisition. Reading is food for the mind. When we read at least 60% of the brain gets activated. Reading helps to develop critical and analytical thinking. If we want to learn a foreign language well, quickly, and thoroughly, Read. More than 70% of a literate person’s vocabulary in his/her first language comes from reading. We can apply the same principle in the second language acquiring process. (Jacob, 2016, p. 317)

Thus, reading is an exercise that provides many contributions to people who read, not only in language acquisition but also in thinking, which is why it is essential to give more strength to reading in language classes.

1.2.2 Reading Identity

People who have a great affinity with reading are known by the term readers, since being so immersed in this act makes them appropriate this quality. Moreover, Ghandehari (2021) establishes that readers are the ones who give meaning to books, magazines, newspapers, and other texts. However, this value or meaning is given through the interpretation that each reader makes of what they read, because as readers read, they also obtain new ways of perceiving that are integrated into their previous knowledge and identity, which makes each reader unique because not everyone perceives the same even if they read the same thing.

Notwithstanding, as readers feel more and more committed to the world of reading, they acquire certain customs when it comes to reading. These reading practices have many ways to

manifest: “reading habits are calculated as how much a person reads, how often they read, when they read and what they read” (Nur Azmin Rosli et al., 2017, p.792). Hence, critical thinking and strategies obtained through reading are characteristics that are incorporated into the identity of readers. Duszynski (2006 as cited in Granado & Puig, 2015) proposes the following definition:

Reading identity is the set of relationships individuals establish with texts (the genealogy of these readings, their reading experiences, their reading preferences, their reading behaviors, their position, and self-perception as is, etc.) formed over time in different contexts (family, school, personal) (p.44)

Reading also creates an emotional dimension in readers because the act of reading produces strong personality traits in the identity of readers, which gives more relevance to the promotion of reading.

1.2.3 Teacher Identity as Readers

Firstly, when human beings begin to be conscious of the inherent characteristics of their personality, they start to forge their own identity through their life experiences. Likewise occurs with the construction of the teaching identity. As Vaillant (2008) mentions, teaching identity emerges in initial training and is nurtured throughout the professional training. In addition, teachers are required to carry out an individual, collective, and dynamic process over time that allows them to shape their subjectivities about teaching.

Nevertheless, teachers take time to analyze how their identity has been constructed, although when they begin with the process of having a more defined teaching identity, they realize that “the teaching professional identity is composed of sub-identities related to each other. These sub-identities have to do with the different contexts in which teachers move” (García, 2009, p.20). By being more aware of these sub-identities, teachers, in line with their context, know which aspects of their identity can be negotiable and which cannot.

Though the teaching identity to have many implications in the workplace, as Akkerman & Meijer, (2011) also declare that:

Being someone who teaches, or teacher identity, cannot be seen as an endpoint, but instead should be defined as an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a coherent and consistent sense of self is

maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life. (p.315)

As stated above, the teaching identity is a personal, progressive development determined by the work environment; throughout the years, many teachers have experienced situations in which they have had to teach subjects that are not part of their specific field and have had to be disloyal to their identity to fit in a specific context, and they have also been criticized for not doing it in the best way.

For instance, there is a biblical story of the Apostle Peter in which he was asked by a beggar for money, and he replied that he could not give what he did not have (Acts 3: 5-6). This biblical passage can be related to the conditions lived by some teachers because it is almost impossible to perform something impeccable when you have not been trained for it.

Applegate and Applegate (2004) embraced this Peter's conceptions to elucidate the teacher's positions towards the enjoyment of reading:

If, for example, a teacher believes that the key to reading success is the ability to read the text and then faithfully reproduce (sic) the author's intended message, then that teacher will likely emphasize literal recall of text details. If a teacher believes that a thoughtful response to the author's message is the essence of reading, techniques such as discussion, literature circles, and the ability to use textual information to support one's ideas will be emphasized. (p. 190-191).

Taking into consideration what these authors proposed, it is possible to say that the teachers' conceptions about reading determine what they do in their classes and how they transmit a love for reading (or not). Hall (2012) argues that schools are places in which students can grasp different reading identities because they have many available models there, so they can identify what are the characteristics that each identity possesses; meanwhile, the learners recognize who they are regarding the models presented. Hence, what Hall (2012) posed coincided with Applegate and Applegate (2004), and the Peter effect is perfectly fulfilled in what he said.

All in all, for students to achieve a good approach to reading, teachers must become exemplary models for them. Kamil et al. (2008) suggested that:

To foster improvement in adolescent literacy, teachers should use strategies to enhance students' motivation to read and engage in the learning process. Teachers should help students build confidence in their ability to comprehend and learn from content-area

texts. They should provide a supportive environment that views mistakes as growth opportunities, encourages self-determination, and provides informational feedback about the usefulness of reading strategies and how the strategies can be modified to fit various tasks. Teachers should also make literacy experiences more relevant to students' interests, everyday life, or important current events. (p.26)

Otherwise, reading will continue to be an activity that generates apathy in students.

1.3 Research Question

How does language teacher educators' identity as readers influence student-teachers' identity as readers at Universidad Católica Luis Amigo?

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective:

To determine the influence of language teacher educators' identity as readers on the construction of student- teachers' identity as readers.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives:

- To identify which are the main aspects of language teacher educators' identity as readers that emerge in the strategies or techniques they implement in their classes.
- To describe how student-teachers integrate their identity as readers as part of their teaching identity construction.
- To analyze to what extent teacher educators' identity as readers has influenced student-teachers identity as readers.

2. Method

2.1 Research Methodology

In this research, we selected a qualitative approach from a constructivist paradigm, because, as Ronald et.al (2007) said, "qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach" (p. 21). In this study we applied an ethnographic method because this perspective facilitates knowing the behavior of certain people, how these people express themselves, and what these people do according to a specific

phenomenon or context that they live in their daily life (Hammersley, 2015). Furthermore, we employed a semi-structured interview because this technique allowed us to formulate open-ended questions to comprehend in a deeper way how teacher educators influence student-teachers in the integration of reading identity into the teaching identity; this type of interview authorizes the researchers to modify or add questions to the interviewees, because as Ryan et al. (2009) mentioned: “The focus is on permitting the interviewee to tell his/her own story rather than answer a series of structured questions” (p.310).

2.2 Context

This research was carried out at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, located in the Los Colores neighborhood in Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia. Since 1998 this private university has offered an academic program related to the teaching of English as a foreign language. However, this program has had multiple modifications over the years regarding the designation, since the design of the program had to be adapted to the current educational.

Nevertheless, according to the Program’s Education Plan ([PEP], Licenciatura en Inglés, 2018) we were inscribed in the program that obtained the fourth curricular proposal, better known as the B. A in English Teaching (SNIES 104645), which had 144 credits and training fields separated in pedagogy, humanistic, and investigative approaches. Although currently there is a new reform, the program changed to 160 credits; its name now is B.A. in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English (SNIES 106287).

As established in the PEP, the future English teachers must be competent at the time of proposing and developing pedagogical proposals and didactic strategies, so that they can internalize the language from an ideological position, and thereby improve the relationship of language with society, history, and culture. In consequence, by considering that the habit of reading could represent certain differential characteristics in the teaching practice, this study intended to explore whether the teacher educators’ identity as readers generates any impact on student-teachers identity as readers.

2.3 Sample

This research was conducted in April 2021. Three teacher educators and three student-teachers from the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó were our participants after giving their informed consent. Further, the criteria for selecting our participants

were through homogenous sampling and criterion sampling (Patton, 2002 as cited in Suri, 2011). The first type of sampling compels researchers to describe a particular group with the same characteristics to gather similar information. For the second one, the researchers must establish some criteria so that in the selection process of the participants, they can meet the predetermined criteria.

The participants had to be people interested in the reading field. We had two different types of participants: teacher educators and student-teachers. The teacher educators' age range was from 35 to 47 years old, and their English level was C1. The student-teachers age range was from 20 to 23 years old, and their English level was from B1 to C1. Only one participant was male, and the rest were women. Finally, the participants allowed us to reveal effective information to reach the aims of this inquiry.

2.4 Data Collection

Initially, both researchers organized a possible category matrix to use for the data collection and analysis. Later, we decided to pose and write the questions for the semi-structured interviews (Appendixes A and B). In this phase, we determined that some questions were going to be similar and others different to show the influence that the teacher educators make on their student-teachers with respect to reading integration to the teaching identity. After having had all the questions established, we applied six semi-structured interviews, and the duration of each of them was between half an hour and a full hour.

Figure 1. *Category Matrix*

1. Reading
 - 1.1 Definition
 - 1.2 Second language Acquisition
 2. Reading Identity
 - 2.1 Reader's Self-Concept
 - 2.2 Reading Practices
 - 2.3 Academic Reading Experiences
 3. Teacher Educators' Identity as Readers
 - 3.1 Promotional Strategies in Teaching Literature
 - 3.2 Teaching Identity
 4. Student Teachers' Identity as Readers
 - 4.1 Previous Formative Experiences
 - 4.2 Teacher Identity
 5. Teacher Educator's Influence on Student-Teachers
 - 5.1 Teacher Educators' Interchange of knowledge
 - 5.2 Shared and learned reading strategies by teacher educators
-

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by integrating the theoretical constructs presented in the literature review with the responses found in the six semi-structured interviews. Nonetheless, for interpreting the participants' responses, the interviews went through different phases: We assembled the data, coded the data, reorganized them, identified new categories, contrasted the data in a category matrix, and posed the concluding interpretations.

In the first stage, we dedicated ourselves to conducting the interviews and transcribing each one of them. Then we structured the responses of the participants in the categories that we already had planned; however, we realized that some categories had to be adjusted according to the evidence; therefore, some categories were created and others were eliminated. Afterward, we contrasted all the information gathered in another category matrix for data analysis, but it was at this point that both researchers elaborated the results and the interpretations thanks to the constant analysis and the connections we made between the categories.

For guaranteeing the validity of this study two different types of triangulations were used. The first one was investigator triangulation because this method implies that different researchers or experts in the field evaluate the project (Guion et al., 2011). Ultimately, for Moon (2019), the data sources triangulation is like the other triangulation methods, but he explains that this one “focuses more on obtaining data from multiple sources within a single data collection method to ensure that a more complete perspective is obtained” (p.103).

3 Results

3.1 First finding: Reading as a Transformative Skill

Reading was the method by which both teacher educators and student-teachers can escape from reality, but through this absence, both can achieve an expansion in their knowledge, ideas, and reflections. Furthermore, reading was considered not only as the act of interpreting written texts, but also as the ability to read the external world, the context, people's body language, etc. On the other hand, reading was an essential factor in the development of a second language because it served not only to strengthen reading but to acquire other skills. These other competencies were speaking, listening, and writing. Even, vocabulary, and the sociolinguistic aspects of the language

can be acquired through reading; although, for these other skills to be carried out, teachers had to implement other types of reading strategies. These were some evidences:

- It is a form in which we can acquire knowledge, ideas, and reflections...We read all the time because we do not read the text, but we read people's expressions, we read social phenomena, we read the interactions that we have with other people, ok, reading is a very wide concept... Is a gateway to new universes. (TE 1- Q1 and Q3)
- When we are reading, we are not only thinking of coding and decoding grammar and mechanics, but we are also talking about the ways that the culture that owns that language expresses its ideas... (TE 2-Q2)
- Reading is a possibility for mediating language because reading allows us for example as teachers the possibility of mediate not only the oral form of the language but also the written form... for example when you use it as part of reading aloud you promote speaking... (TE 3-Q3)

3.2 Second Finding: Reading's Personal and Social Dimension

The participants demonstrated that reading makes them have a more open, critical, and analytical mind, which is why it can be said that reading greatly influences the identity by becoming better thinkers after each reading act. Nevertheless, having acquired this critical component as part of their identity, our participants stated that they not only read to themselves because all that they had learned through reading they needed to share with other people, either so that others may want to read or so that they modify their way of thinking.

- Being a reader is becoming a more open-minded person and a critical thinker...When you read, your conceptions are bigger and maybe you can become a more tolerant person...I am open-minded, I am a passionate reader, I am a bookworm, I am an obsessive book buyer, but the most important is that I'm a very respectful reader because I don't judge people because of what they read. (TE 2-Q5 and Q6)
- I have always liked that the reading process is a divulgation talk. I do not only read for me, I also read for others, since when I find something important, I like to share it. I feel happy when I find something in a text to discuss it with someone, with my students or with my friends, and this influences a lot in my identity. (ST 6-Q5 and Q6)¹

¹ This was a translation from Spanish to English and it was made to give more consistency to this paper.

3.3 Third finding: Teachers as an Essential Key to Promoting Reading Habits

This was one of our most important findings because we confirmed that teacher educators greatly influenced their student-teachers, since teacher educators shared reading material, suggested readings, helped their students to implement reading in their practicum classes. Most importantly, the student-teachers interviewed admitted to all this influence. Besides, it was found that student-teachers felt attracted to listening to their teacher educators' speech because through dialogue the reading identity they possessed was evidenced, and student-teachers got motivated to read to acquire a similar discourse.

Notwithstanding, there was an unexpected finding which was that there were some teacher educators and student-teachers who made a difference between reading for academic purposes and reading for pleasure, but there were others who did not make this difference because for them all reading material, regardless of its nature, is part of the space or the moment for reading. Moreover, this distinction was made because, for teacher educators, academic reading is more cognitively demand, and for student-teachers, this type of reading in some cases is often seen as something mandatory. There was even a student who, depending on the strategy that teachers used with reading, decided whether they read or not.

- We have a lot of academic reading in every course, but I share articles with them, but for my practicum students, I also share reading material that is not purely academic. I share digital books that I have worked with them; they can also read for pleasure... I recommend books depending on my student's personality, but most of the time I have recommended books to them... I encourage my students to implement extensive readings in their classes... Students who do not like to read it is because they have not found the right book (sic.) (TE 1- Q15, Q16, Q17, and Q18)
- When some students ask me about something of the class, I took advantage, and depending on students' questions or interests I recommend books, authors, etc... I strongly believe that we do not need a level of English for a book. I think we just need to read... I have advised my students on how to implement reading in their classes... For example, I have always told my students you are going to be a teacher you need to read. It does not matter if you do not like to read, you must read in your classes because reading is part of the English language... I have advised or I have noticed that not all my students read books. They read comics, so read comic with your students... (TE 2- Q15, Q16, Q17, and Q18)
- The teacher educators help us in our teaching practices and in how to prepare a class... I recognize the teacher as readers mainly by their vocabulary, they express themselves in a much more secure

way, they have much more repertoire... The teacher had so much knowledge of so many topics that he was able to argue with such validity and forcefulness... When it comes to reading and in how to implement it in the practices, things change a little because the teachers give you more tools such as how to make a warmup, talk about what the title is about, change parts of the story, etc.... (ST 4- Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, and Q15)²

- I recognize teachers as readers when they express themselves and they mention many authors, arguments, they recommend other authors with other perspectives about the same topic... I feel so grateful because of those recommendations due to them inspiring me to be like them (sic.). I just write down everything they recommend to me, and I try to before the last class looking for those recommendations or those authors. (ST 5-Q17)
- Most of the readings for the most important subjects I read. However, those that I considered that were not important I made a scanning. I greatly evaluate the importance of the text depending on how the teachers are going to implement it in the classes, because if they are the type of teachers who make you read something, but in the following classes they do not say anything about reading, I did not lose my time on that. (ST 6-Q10)³
- Any kind of books that are not for pleasure are more academic but over time they become for pleasure (TE 2-Q3)
- For academic readings, I cannot say that I like it or that I hate it because sometimes if I feel the need and the desire to read something academic and the problem comes when the teachers come and recommend it to us as something more mandatory, then when already I see that mandatory part, I already lose interest in reading (sic). (ST 4-Q3)

4. Discussion

Reading is an activity that has many benefits, whether academically, personally, or socially; therefore, teacher educators and student-teachers who are readers generate many positive implications for learning a language, for reading the social context, and for learning to take critical positions.

This study has confirmed that reading makes second language learners acquire other types of skills related to language as such. For this reason, both teacher educators and student-teachers must implement reading in their classes, not only to strengthen reading comprehension skills but also for their students to learn vocabulary, grammatical and textual structures, use of tone of voice when reading, among others.

² This was a translation from Spanish to English and it was made to give more consistency to this paper.

³ This was a translation from Spanish to English and it was made to give more consistency to this paper.

Furthermore, the teacher educators and student-teachers stated that the habit of reading generated critical thinking in them, and thanks to this new way of reasoning and reflecting both can make a better reading of their environment with its characteristics. This implies that reading helps to build a society in the sense that readers are more aware of social problems, and, having an analytical way of thinking, people who read are more likely to find possible solutions to what happens. Then, if teacher educators as well as student-teachers promote reading not only to enrich the language but also to improve the community, surely the students will be more aware of their role in society and the responsibilities that this entails.

On the other hand, the way in which teacher educators and student-teachers approach reading or the strategies they use are essential keys to minimizing students' aversion to reading. In consequence, teachers in general should adopt an interesting or seductive discourse when referring to reading. Moreover, when teachers are going to assign readings for a class, it is fundamental that they do not make them look like something mandatory, or assign readings without purpose, or establish readings for students to fill out several blank spaces about it. Otherwise, students will not feel motivated to read or include reading as part of their habits. Thereby, teachers must know that their students read the intentions that they have with the readings, and it is precisely for this same reason that teachers must think very well about how they are going to implement reading and what strategies they could use to engage their students more.

To conclude, both teacher educators and student-teachers said that being immersed in the world of reading over time creates a lot of passion for this, and it is for this reason that when readers talk with their friends or close people speak about what they have read, what they liked and what they didn't, what they think about the book, how they felt; this implies that readers not only read for themselves but also for others, and through this act, a lot of knowledge can be shared. Hence, if reading is promoted within the educational system, students will be disseminating intellectual content, and in this way, society will be more humane and with a more educated culture. All in all, it is recommended that teachers encourage reading for all the benefits that this activity brings and that they evaluate how they do it; and for teachers who are not very fond of reading it is suggested that they try to get closer to reading because students need the kinds of skills that are created by reading.

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Appendix A: Interview for Student-Teachers

1. What is reading for you?
2. What role do you think reading plays in acquiring a second language?
3. What do you read?
4. How often do you read?
5. What does it mean for you to be a reader?
6. How do you describe yourself as a reader?
7. What kind of reader do you think you are?
8. What are your reading strategies when you are reading academic readings?
9. What are your reading strategies when you are reading for pleasure?
10. How responsible have you been with the readings proposed by each course in the university?
11. Do you look for more readings to understand better the topic of a class?
12. How do you believe that your reading identity has influenced your teaching identity construction?
13. Has a teacher ever recommended books or some readings to you?
14. Has any teacher shared reading material with you?
15. Have you asked a teacher to suggest readings?
16. How do you recognize teacher educators' identity as readers? How do you identify with them? How do you react when you feel identify with teacher educators' identity as readers?
17. Have you adopted any strategy or activity related to reading that you have learned from your teacher educators? If the answer is yes, can you tell us what of those strategies have you implemented with your practicum students?

Appendix B: Interview for Teacher Educators

1. What is reading for you?
2. What role do you think reading plays in acquiring a second language?
3. What do you read?
4. How often do you read?
5. What does it mean for you to be a reader?
6. How do you describe yourself as a reader?
7. What kind of reader do you think you are?
8. What are your reading strategies when you are reading academic readings?
9. What are your reading strategies when you are reading for pleasure?
10. Have you studied something related to reading?
11. Have you taught courses related to reading?
12. How do you implement reading in your classes?
13. What kinds of strategies do you use to engage your students with reading or with the readings you proposed?
14. What factors of being a reader do you think have influenced your teaching identity construction?
15. Have you ever shared some reading material with your student-teachers? What kind of reading material?
16. Have you ever recommended readings or books to your student-teachers? What kind of books?
17. Have you ever shared with your student-teachers some strategies to promote and implement reading in their own classes?
18. What have you done with those student-teachers who have reading problems to encourage them to read more?