

Control of Emotions in Language Teacher Identity Construction

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Abstract

This paper aimed to determine how pre-service language teacher's emotions influence the construction of their teaching identity. Specifically, this research project sought to register strategies used by these teachers to control their emotions in relation to their teaching practice. To develop this research, researchers selected four pre-service language teachers from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó (Medellín). To collect the necessary data, two instruments were used: A problem tree which was developed through (Jamboard, 2021) in order to record strategies and deficiencies regarding pre-service teachers' ability to manage their emotions; and a focus group, which was mediated through (Meet, 2021) to record challenging teaching experiences participants had and how they overcame them. The data point to the three main conclusions (1) pre-service language teacher' emotions can change easily during the practicum process; (2) teaching experiences are highly influenced by teacher's context and beliefs; and (3) interacting with other people is one of the best strategies to control negative emotions in the classroom.

Key words: teacher identity, emotions, context, beliefs

Resumen

Este trabajo tuvo como objetivo determinar cómo el control de las emociones influye en la construcción su identidad docente. En concreto, este proyecto buscó registrar las estrategias utilizadas por estos profesores en pre-servicio para controlar sus emociones con respecto a su práctica docente. Para desarrollar esta investigación, los investigadores seleccionaron a cuatro profesores de licenciatura en inglés en formación de la Universidad Católica Luis Amigó (Medellín). Para recopilar los datos necesarios, se utilizaron dos instrumentos: un árbol de problemas que se desarrolló a través de (Jamboard, 2021) con el fin de registrar las estrategias y deficiencias en cuanto a la capacidad de los profesores en formación para manejar sus emociones; y un grupo de enfoque, que fue mediado a través de (Meet, 2021), para registrar las experiencias de enseñanza desafiantes que los participantes tuvieron y cómo las superaron. Los datos apuntan a las tres conclusiones principales (1) las emociones del profesor de idiomas en formación pueden cambiar fácilmente durante el proceso de práctica; (2) las experiencias de enseñanza están muy influenciadas por el contexto y las creencias del maestro; y (3) interactuar con otras personas es una de las mejores estrategias para controlar las emociones negativas en el aula.

Palabras clave: identidad docente, emociones, contexto, creencias

Degree Requirement

This case study project is submitted as a requirement to graduate from the Bachelor's Degree in English teaching (Licenciatura en Inglés) at the School of Education and Humanities, Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, in Medellín, Colombia.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As pre-service English teachers, we experienced some conflicting emotions during our practicum, particularly when we were conscious that we had to develop a class, for the beliefs we had about how to carry out teaching. It is important to recognize that every future teacher can experience those emotions, but it is important to learn how to control them. Also, it is necessary to be aware that language teachers have to learn to develop their classes successfully without being affected by their emotions.

The lack of knowledge about the control of emotions affects teacher's construction of their identity. This problem arises in the teaching practicum when student teachers feel how negative emotions influence the development of their classes. This situation worried us because it is normal for pre-service language teachers to experience problems during their practicum. This lack of emotional control affects not only teacher's identity construction, but also students' learning.

Therefore, this research is oriented towards helping pre-service teachers learn about how to control those negative emotions and their influence on their teacher identity construction. We focused on discovering what pre-service language teachers feel during their practicum. Besides, the idea was to know how these negative emotions influenced teacher identity and suggest strategies to deal with them. The main goal of this research was to understand how the control of emotions influences the identity construction of pre-service teachers during the practicum.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Theoretical Framework

“Emotions are crucial factors that influence how successful individuals are in leading their personal and professional lives” (Lee et al. 2016, p. 2.) Emotions are an important factor that influences the development of jobs in our lives. The positive or negative emotions people feel determine their efficiency in carrying out an activity. In education is the same. Teacher identity is affected by emotions. Emotions, whether negative or positive, influence the development of teachers' work and the construction of their teacher identity.

For Lee et al. (2016), “Emotions are an integral part of a teacher's job and it is important for teachers to use appropriate strategies to manage these emotions” (p. 3.). When teacher get

to control the emotions, they are able to apply different strategies to improve the management of negative emotions. Consequently, having good emotional control can help teachers improve the development of the lessons and handle different situations that could arise in the classroom.

“Identity formation and emotion are inextricably linked, informing each other and re-defining interpretations of each other; the search for identity requires the connection of emotion with self-knowledge” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 5). It is important to consider the meaning of experience with regard to the construction of identity. Teacher identity is connected with the experiences and emotions teachers have while teaching. Then, the construction of teacher identity is related to teacher’s autobiography and perceptions about their personal and professional selves acquired during previous teaching events. Hence, it is important to know how pre-services teachers deal with negative emotions in the practicum and how these emotions influence the construction of their teacher identity.

1.2.2 Research Antecedents

The interest to research how emotions influence teacher identity is fairly recent. Although there is a significant number of studies that have been conducted in the field of emotions, especially in regard to how emotions are associated with the construction of the teacher identity, there are relatively few in relation with Colombian pre-service language teachers with their environment and their beliefs, which are important factors that influence the construction of their teacher identity.

One of the previous studies conducted was about the emotional intelligence of pre-service language teachers during practicum experiences through autobiographical narrative. The research mainly found that “teachers faced negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, and anger as a result of gaps on lesson planning and lack of experience in relation to the school context” (Cardona et al,2019, p14). The lack of clarity at the moment of carrying out a class could produce in the person a feeling of insecurity that provokes the negative emotions in pre-service language teachers. This study concluded that emotions emerge from personal situations and also in the teaching context by environmental or professional situations that influence the teaching process.

Another study related to emotional development and construction of teacher identity shows the close relation between personal and professional identity and how the emotions influence both of them. This study focused on emotions such as anger, love, fear, worry,

enthusiasm, pride, joy, anxiety, and dependence. The results were relevant in the sense that “pre-service teachers’ identity development is directly related to their emotions” (Teng, 2017, p14). Emotions cannot be separated from the professional or personal identity; these are inextricably linked. People naturally feel different emotions according to a proper situation and teachers are not the exception. Teachers could feel different emotions when they are carrying out their practicum, thereon the importance of what Teng calls “emotional rules, which prescribe the practices that pre-service teachers must adopt to meet the expectations for the teacher role, have acted as norms that code, rank, suppress, control, and regulate emotional responses related to conformity and deviance” (Teng, 2017, p14).

Another study is about the importance of emotions in the construction of teacher identity, but it focused on how teacher emotions can become triggers of resistance and self-transformation. Understanding how emotions reflect self-knowledge and how that knowledge influences the construction of teacher identity is the idea of this study. Teachers establish connections with students in order to make comprehensible the message they want to transmit and these connections are mediated by the emotions in their identity. Understanding the role of emotions in the construction of teacher identity helps teachers to determine their professional identity. Zembylas (2003) claims that “understanding the teacher-self through an exploration of emotion opens possibilities for the care and the self-knowledge of teachers and provides spaces for their transformation” (p. 2). It means that teachers have to recognize the importance of the emotion’s role in their practicum. This study helps us to take into account that emotions are reflected in the academic processes carried out with students; that is why it is important to recognize our emotions at the moment of constructing teacher identity and carrying out teacher practices, because this recognition helps to establish a better connection with students and to make the content more significant to achieve a more meaningful learning.

1.3 Research Question

To know how emotions influence teacher identity, we wanted to conduct this research with the intention of answering the following question:

How does the control of emotions influence the teacher identity construction of pre-service language teachers?

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

- To explore how the control of emotions influences the identity of pre-service language teachers.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- To distinguish emotions that can affect pre-service language teachers' identity.
- To indicate the reasons why pre-service language teachers, need to learn how to control their emotions in the construction of their teacher identity.
- To register strategies which help to improve pre-services teachers' control of their emotions.

2. Method

In this section you will find the research paradigm and methodology that we used. We also describe our participants, the context where this research was conducted, and the data collection and analysis.

2.1 Research Paradigm and Methodology

In order to discover which emotions influence pre-service language teachers' identity, we worked from the qualitative tradition and the interpretive paradigm through a case study. The interpretative paradigm allows the researchers to:

“Manage the attention to those aspects not observable, not measurable, or susceptible to quantification (beliefs, intentions, motivations, interpretations, meanings for social actors), [it] interprets and evaluates reality, does not measure it. This is open, flexible and emergent. The own results that are obtained during the investigative process itself go delimiting the next thing to be investigated and the planning of the process, which will be cyclical and interactive displays”.
(Rivera, 2010, p. 6)

This research was done through virtual means. Interactions with the participants were conducted in Spanish to make better use of their emotions.

2.2 Context

Due to the covid- 19 pandemic, this research was done 100% virtual with pre-service language teachers in their last semester of the English teaching degree at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó in Medellín, Colombia, which is a private university located in the neighborhood Carlos E. Restrepo.

2.3 Sample

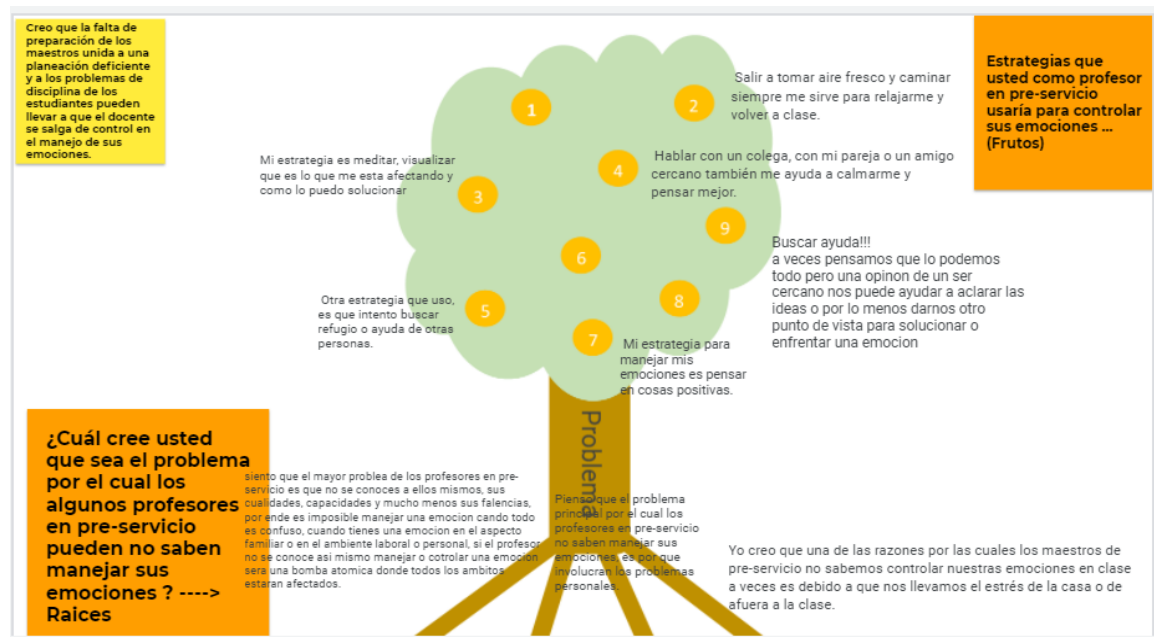
Participants were selected by a Stratified purposeful sampling (Marshall, 1996) because we as researchers focused on participants with certain characteristics. Participants were students in the last semester, with a B1 level of English minimum, who were finishing their professional practicum. The main goal was to know how emotions influenced the construction of their teacher identity. For this reason, this project was carried out with four pre-service language teachers who were in their last semester of the English teaching program at Luis Amigó. At the moment of carrying out this project participants and researchers were between 20 and 30 years old.

2.4 Data Collection

For this research we used two data collection instruments: (1) one interactive technique (a problem tree guided by (Jamboard, 2021), which is a platform that allows participants to interact at the same time) and (2) a discussion group with the participants, which took place after completing the problem tree.

In this section we had a problem tree with 4 participants. The problem tree consisted of two questions. During the completion of the problem tree, the instructions were specified. In the roots, the students had to introduce what they thought were the problem, that is, the reasons why some teachers did not know how to handle their emotions. For this part, each student selected a part of the root to enter their answers. For the second part, in the fruits section of the tree, students had to write strategies to achieve control of emotions. Each participant had 2 fruits to introduce the strategies that they commonly used to control their emotions while carrying out their practicum. This process lasted one hour. The participants were given the space to introduce their answers. Afterward, there was a sharing moment for participants to explain their answers so as to achieve a better interpretation of their words. Figure 1 shows the problem tree.

Figure 1
Problem Tree



For the focus group we formulated five (5) questions implemented in the form of a conversation to not deviate from the objectives previously proposed. This process lasted one hour. The first question was used to start the conversation. The other questions were introduced according to the relevance and rhythm of the discussion. This section had 4 participants, whose participation was key to interpret their words during the problem tree and thus achieve meaningful findings that gave body to our research. Table 1 shows the category matrix, where our theoretical base, categories, sub-categories, and main data collection tools are specified for our research objectives.

Table 1
Category Matrix

Objective 1: To distinguish emotions that can affect a pre-service language teacher's identity.

Theoretical Base	Main Category	Sub-categories	Data Collection
Cardona et al. (2019)	Teacher identity: Is made up of the beliefs and the values that a teacher has for their career as teacher. It involves a dynamic process through which the personal identity is interconnected with the professional identity of the person, both complementing and helping to construct the overall teacher identity.	Beliefs: Are all the perceptions that a teacher has about how to carry out the process of teaching-learning in the classroom.	Interview: With this method we collected specific information about the emotions that could affect or influence the construction of the teacher identity in pre-service language teachers. Possible questions: -What feelings do you have or do you have when you are in your place of practicum? -What is the best or worst experience in your practicum?

Objective 2: To register strategies which help to improve pre-services teachers to control their emotions.

Objective 3: To explain why pre-service language teachers need to learn how to control their emotions in the construction of their teacher identity.

Theoretical Base	Main Category	Sub-categories	Data Collection
Teng (2017)	Emotions are the reactions to any situation that we experience during a moment. The emotions are closely linked to personal and professional life.	Positive emotions such as happiness, love, joy, interest and Negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, frustration.	Conversational space: With this method, we could see how pre-service language teachers expressed their emotions according to their experience. It helped to identify those emotions that influenced the development of the teacher identity and some strategies that could help them to control their emotions.

2.5 Data Analysis

This research was developed by coding and analyzing the data obtained with the problem tree and the focus group. With this process we identified common elements in student teachers' responses. For this research we used two different types of triangulations: time triangulation (Burns, 1996) because the problem tree and the focal group were developed in two different moments. We also used researcher triangulation because the two researchers analyzed the information separately. Finally, in order to increase trustworthiness and validity, we used expert examination through our advisor.

3. Results

3.1 Finding 1

The first thing to note is the constant changes in emotions, since teachers were interacting with many students during a work day. This caused quick emotional changes over a short period of time. The participants showed that emotions can change rapidly because it is possible to pass in a short time from a positive emotion to a negative emotion or from a negative emotion to a positive emotion. For example, one of the participants showed the quick changes of emotions during the time in the institution.

“A mí me genera al principio emoción, curiosidad, impacto, y soy muy observadora, entonces sí, me da como ganas de investigar, pero cuando ya llevo un tiempo en el lugar de práctica, la verdad, me genera algo de estrés porque como que ya me siento más parte de la comunidad como tal, con más responsabilidades y me estreso un poco más” (G.f.C.p2)

This stress was caused by the routine generated in the school context. She expressed the next when they arrive to a new place:

“El primer sentimiento, naturalmente fue de miedo, fueron nervios, porque yo sé la importancia de llegar bien desde el primer momento, de hacer una buena primera impresión. Entonces al principio sentí muchos nervios, pero pues traté de manejarlos, con la ayuda de mi CT. Llegué muy bien a los grupos que tenía que llegar, entonces ya el sentimiento de miedo se fue transformando y me sentía más cómoda, más involucrada y contenta pues obviamente” (G.f.C.p4)

3.2, Finding 2

Internal situations of abuse of authority or not sharing the same capacities generated different emotions in teachers. Pre-service language teachers demonstrated that teacher identity is highly influenced by the context and their beliefs. For example, in this part, one participant expressed the following:

“Para mí la mejor experiencia que tuve hasta el momento en mis prácticas fue tener la oportunidad de enseñarles a niños de otro país, en estados unidos, y me di cuenta que, aunque sean de otros países, y tengan otras realidades, les pude llegar a ellos muy fácilmente, ósea, siguen siendo niños, ¿me entiendes? Y aprendí también, desmentí muchos mitos sobre los estudiantes de otros países, sobre la cultura en sí, entonces me gustó mucho esa experiencia, creo que fue una de las más valiosas porque aprendí no solo a ser profe, sino también de otros contextos y otras realidades.”
G.f.C.p3

These situations created emotions that influenced the development of teaching practices that require emotional support for the students by the teacher, but teachers also needed

emotional support to control their emotions and construct their teacher identity. Therefore, the lack of knowledge of emotions did not allow teachers to act in some situations. For example, another participant expressed:

“Siento que el mayor problema de los profesores en pre-servicio es que no se conocen a ellos mismos, sus cualidades, capacidades y mucho menos sus falencias” (Raíz.A.p.J)

3.3 Finding 3

Seeking professional help is often uncomfortable for some people because they do not find a connection with strangers. To interact with other people is a good strategy that helps pre-service language teachers to control their emotions. For example, this participant expressed one strategy to control emotions:

“¡¡¡Buscar ayuda!!! A veces pensamos que lo podemos todo pero una opinión de un ser cercano nos puede ayudar a aclarar las ideas o por lo menos darnos otro punto de vista para solucionar o enfrentar una emoción” (Est.A.p.J)

As we can see, it is a common strategy that pre-service teachers find very important. Receiving advice from another person helps the way to act in their practicum. Another participant suggested:

“Hablar con un colega, con mi pareja o un amigo cercano también me ayuda a calmarme y pensar mejor”(Est.A.p.C)

4. Discussion

Emotions play an important role in teachers' development, not only on their personal but also on their professional identity, both of which are interrelated. This research made us aware of the importance of the role that emotions play in the teaching profession. Lee says that “Emotions are crucial factors that influence how successful individuals are in leading their personal and professional lives” (2016, p.2). As the focus of our research was the emotions, we see necessary to emphasize the importance of emotions not only in the personal lives of teachers but also in their teaching processes.

Emotions can emerge for different reasons, whether they be environmental, academic or personal. It is important to have a clear way to respond to those emotions using different strategies that help to develop in pre-services language teachers a control over their emotions. Teachers who are able to identify their emotions will think calmly and find a way to handle the situation using a strategy that allows them to regulate an unwanted reaction. Hence the

importance of using strategies to control emotions. Emotions play an integral role in teacher's job and it is important for them use the most adequate strategies to control their emotions (as cited in Lee, 2016, p.3).

We were not able to apply all the instruments we originally intended to use because of the limitations of time to develop this research, but that did not affect the data collection and analysis. Our recommendation is to create instruments flexible to the possible changes of the research. Despite these constraints, we took advantage of the problem tree. This instrument played an important role because it allowed the participants to take their academic experiences, creating a kind of *déjà vu* (type of *paramnesia* of the recognition of some experience that feels as if it had been previously lived) right at the time of the activity, which allowed them to provide answers that were very valuable and meaningful to our research.

If teachers do not recognize their emotions, this will create constant crises, personal and professional, that will affect all the relationships inside the academic environment. Further research could be interested in the construction of more strategies to help pre-service language teachers to have control over their emotions. Also, we think it is important to add or adapt emotional courses in the university curriculum to promote emotional health.

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