

Understanding teachers' career choices: Narratives from international in-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

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Abstract

This international study investigated factors that shape individuals' decisions to become English teachers as a Foreign Language (EFL). Using a qualitative narrative study design, data was collected from 25 in-service teachers in two different groups from Middle Eastern, Asian, African and Latin American countries. Twelve of the participants were recipients of the US Department of State via Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) scholarship and participants in the Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) program organized by IREX. The other thirteen participants were non-funded in service EFL teachers. Results indicated that EFL in-service teachers use narratives and counter narratives to refer to their career decision process. In-service teachers reflect and base their career decision-making process within three comprehensive areas, i.e. personal realization, support system and access to education. Thus, this international longitudinal study with EFL in-service teachers was designed to explore the areas that influence teachers' motivations and perceptions when choosing the teaching profession, especially EFL teaching.

Keywords: in-service teachers; EFL teachers; narrative research; narratives; career choices.

Resumen

Este estudio internacional investiga los factores que moldean las decisiones sobre la profesión, tomadas por maestros de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en diversas regiones del mundo. Se diseñó un estudio cualitativo en base a narrativas y se obtuvo data de un total de 25 maestros que provienen de países del Medio Oriente, Asia, África y Latinoamérica. Dichos maestros están divididos en dos grupos: doce de ellos recibieron una beca del Departamento de Estado de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, por medio de la Oficina de Asuntos Educativos y Culturales (ECA) y participaron del programa Teaching Excellence Achievement (TEA) organizado por IREX. Los trece maestros participantes restantes no recibieron dicho beneficio. Los resultados indican que los maestros de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera usaron narrativas y contra narrativas para referirse al proceso de toma de decisiones de sus carreras profesionales. Dichos maestros reflexionan y explican sus decisiones profesionales dentro de tres áreas de análisis: su realización personal, su sistema de apoyo y sus posibilidades de acceso a la educación. Este estudio longitudinal con maestros de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera fue diseñado para explorar las áreas que influyen las motivaciones y percepciones de docentes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en el momento de elegir la Carrera docente, especialmente, la docencia en lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: maestros de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, investigación narrativa, narrativas, elección de carrera profesional.

WE HAVE SET up to inquire the reasons that shape in-service teachers' decisions to become EFL teachers in varied regions of the world. This study is the first phase of a longitudinal international study that intends to promote and expand global understanding of teachers' career choices. To complete this goal, data from international pre- and in-service EFL teachers will be compared to data from pre- and in-service American teachers, both English language arts (ELA) and English teachers as a second language (ESL).

Written reflections, life stories and histories triggered by a semi-structured questionnaire, provided us authors with insight into teachers' decision-making process before becoming EFL educators. We, the author-researchers were interested in analyzing how EFL in-service teachers from different countries around the world used narratives, counter-narratives and reflections to demonstrate their career choice process and self-portrayed professional identities amidst a great choice of university careers. Having learned EFL for many years positions these teachers at an advantage with respect to other individuals. The skill to perform in English together with their appreciation for the English language, shape the stance taken by the participant teachers.

Narratives constitute a pertinent research methodology to study teachers' lives (Beattie, 2007; Munro, 1998) and career decision-making process. Areas worth of further research include influence of family and friends in the teachers' decision making process, the levels of sustained motivation and satisfaction with the career chosen and the needs in-service teachers have while traversing the middle stage of their careers.

Background in the Literature: Teachers' Career Choices

Classroom teachers' motivations to choose the teaching career have been researched in different contexts, e.g. North America (Akar, 2012; Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1999; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008) and Australia and New Zealand (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Sinclair, Dawson & Mc Inerney, 2006). Though there have been trials to conduct cross-cultural studies looking for commonalities, inadequacies or differences among different contexts, an established framework has not been found in which to select, organize and compare significant factors influencing individuals' career choices (Akar, 2012).

Instruments designed to measure motivations to teach have been designed along the years: (a) the Orientations for Teaching Survey (OTS) was created to measure the validity of a motivation-to-teach instrument in a psychometric context (Ferrell & Daniel, 1993), (b) the Modified Orientations to Teach Survey (MOTS) was designed to measure ten specific motivations to teach clustered around perceptions (Sinclair et al., 2006), (c) the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice Scale (FIT-Choice) designed to determine the strength of influence for a range of motivations within the choice of

the teaching profession (Richardson & Watt, 2006, Watt & Richardson, 2007), (d)- the Teachers' Ten Statements Test (TTST) derived from the Twenty Statements Test (TST) by Kuhn and McPartland (1954). The TTST is a structured qualitative instrument that measures teachers' motivations. Participants are asked to respond to the prompt "I am a teacher because..." ten times (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011).

Research carried out with teacher candidates suggest that their motivations when starting teacher education programs are mainly related to their interest to work with children or adolescents, value of education, desire to help others, dissatisfaction with previous career, benefits/convenience of teaching, ease of entry into teacher education courses or teaching jobs, love of learning/teaching, love for a particular area of knowledge, influence of family, teachers and community, opportunities for social advancement and opportunities for interacting with others. Thus, research studies summarize teachers' motivations within three broad categories, namely altruistic (e.g. help children succeed), socio-cultural (e.g. social influences), and intrinsic (e.g. teaching) and extrinsic (e.g. level of payment) (Anthony & Ord, 2008, Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1999, 2002; Salı, 2013; Sinclair et al., 2006).

However Richardson and Watt (2006) and Watt and Richardson (2007) argue against the traditional interpretation of the afore mentioned concepts in the process of choosing the teaching career and look for more updated and better defined constructs to explain this process. They developed the FIT-Choice framework, consisting of eighteen factors, twelve motivation factors, five beliefs about the profession and one career choice satisfaction factor, departing from the expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Motivation factors include ability, intrinsic career value, fallback career, job security, time for family, job transferability, shaping future of children and adolescents, enhancing social equity, making social influences, making social contribution, working with children/adolescents, prior teaching and learning experiences and social influences. The motivation factors contain three to five items each. The beliefs about teaching factors include expertise, difficulty, social status, salary and social dissuasion. The complete scale evaluation format is a seven-point Likert scale in which 1 means not important at all and 7 means extremely important (Akar, 2012, p. 68).

Researchers have recognized that only a few studies have reported about personal motivations to become EFL teachers (Kiriacou & Benmansour, 1999; Zhao, 2008; Salı, 2013). Two of the studies searched into the reasons that influenced student teachers' decisions to become teachers of a foreign language (Kiriacou and Benmansour, 1999; Salı 2013) whereas the other searched into the lives and motivations of in-service EFL teachers (Zhao, 2008).

Kiriacou & Benmansour (1999) studied a sample of 83 student teachers of English in Morocco and a sample of 69 student teachers of French in the UK. They rated twenty-

two reasons influencing their career choice in a survey. Results show similarities and differences between the groups. The premises *I enjoy the subject I will teach, I want to help children succeed, the language is important to me* and *I like teaching*, received the highest ratings. The authors also explained differences related to culture, values and other circumstances influencing the work of FL teachers in these two countries (Kiriaco & Benmansour, 1999). Similar results were obtained by a life histories study with 17 in-service teachers in China, in which the motivation to teach EFL appeared in the following themes: enjoying the subject, teaching provides job security, having influence on people (Zhao, 2008). Salı (2013) studied 1012 pre-service teachers' responses to a structured qualitative measure at a university in Turkey. Results consist of 4 composite themes and 26 sub-factors of which 11 are stand-alone factors. Socio-cultural influences are mostly chosen to explain personal motivations to choose EFL teaching and the most influential factors include intrinsic career value, loving the subject matter, social influences and extrinsic career value.

This international study of in-service EFL teachers around the world intends to add to the body of literature on EFL teachers' career choices in varied areas of the world in which English is taught and learned as a foreign language. More research in this area is necessary since EFL teachers and their process of career choices are underrepresented in the literature.

The International Growth of English

In the last 45 years, English has grown as the most widespread foreign language in the world. For example, 115 millions of English learners added to 275 million native English speakers in the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and some *Anglophone* countries in Asia and Africa in the 1970's (Gage & Ohannessian, 1974). Central and Eastern European countries were expecting 30 million English learners during the 1990's (1989/90 British Council Annual Report as cited in Philipson, 1992, p. 7). By 1995, there were 1.400 million people living in countries where English was the official language and it was calculated that one out of five of the world's population spoke English at a certain level of proficiency (press release on British Council's English 2000 Project, as cited in Graddol, 1997, p.2). The number of English learners (ELs) in China has reached 300 million in the 2000's (Ragan & Jones, 2013).

Along this continuous growth in numbers of speakers and learners, English has reached a dominant position within a myriad of domains as varied as science, medicine and technology, international business, diplomacy, mass media, entertainment, journalism and education (Graddol, 1997; Kachru, 2006; Philipson, 1992; Yano, 2001). English dominance has been established by its functional importance, its outreach and extent of influence, especially when solving language barriers problems in international

communication situations (Kachru, 2006; Philipson, 1992; Yano, 2001). Undoubtedly, English has been used as a means of mutual understanding in an era of multilateral relations. However, English unprecedented linguistic expansion has been considered problematic in various aspects: (1) minor languages have been menaced with extinction and (2) a monolingual, monocultural understanding of different social groups and their values and beliefs about the world have been imposed (Kachru, 2006; Yano, 2001).

English Dominance in the World: Defining Linguistic Concepts

Before analyzing English dominance in the world, specific concepts need to be defined, namely, native language (NL) or (L1), second language (SL) or (L2) and foreign language (FL). According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) definitions of native language (NL) or (L1) include criteria such as origin, function, competence, self-identification and identification by others (as cited in Philipson, 1992, p.39). Cook (1999), citing Bloomfield's (1933) concept, and Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarthy (2008) define L1 as the language first learnt, best known and mostly used by speakers. SL and FL have been defined as languages learned in educational settings with the following objectives: (1) SL is used habitually as a means of communication in different domains such as education and government by speakers with a different L1 and (2) FL is used to favor communication with speakers or for accessing specialized literature on different areas in that foreign language (Philipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarthy, 2008). ESL settings include India, Nigeria, Singapore and the USA, where it is a standard to refer to programs designed to teach English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), whereas EFL occurs in countries such as Japan, Iran or Argentina (Philipson, 1992).

English Spread in the World

Specialists have analyzed the historical dissemination of English in the world according to patterns of acquisition and functionality in which the language is used across different cultures and in contact with other languages. Philipson (1992) refers to them as *core English-speaking countries* and *periphery-English countries* (p.17). Kachru (1985, 2006) analyzes English expansion using three concentric circles: *the inner circle*, *the outer circle (or extended circle)*, and *the expanding circle*. Yano (2001) explains further that within the inner circle English is spoken as a native language (ENL), within the *outer circle* it is a second language (ESL), and in the *expanding circle*, it is a foreign language (EFL). According to Okushima (1995) and Pakir (1999) English has become a *glocal* language with an international outreach, meaning it affords global communication, but at the same time favors the development of local self-identity within different social groups (as cited in Yano, 2001, p.124; Graddol 1997). On the contrary, EFL contexts, do not impose a domestic use of English on its speakers. Certain areas of the world reserve

the use of English as a global language to communicate with international markets and secure progress through education (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Kachru, 2006; Yano, 2001).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study is to inquire about EFL in-service teachers' career choice process and to describe what factors influence their decision-making. We are interested in analyzing the use of narratives and counter-narratives by means of which teachers explain their own decision-making process. These inquiries have been followed in many conversations with EFL teachers and faculty at a college of education and data has revealed that EFL in-service teachers based their decisions on the following general assumptions:

1. Love and passion for the English Language
2. Influence from models
3. Need to get a job that affords them a living

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide our study:

1. What reasons shape individuals' decisions to become EFL teachers?
2. How, if at all, do EFL teachers use narratives and counter-narratives to demonstrate their career choice?
3. Influence from models
4. Need to get a job that affords them a living

Research Methodology Framework

Narrative Pedagogy

Riesman (2008) argues in favor of narratives that provide stories with more power than even the resistant subversive acts. Telling the story "makes the moment live beyond the moment" (p. 11). Recently, researchers, teacher educators and other agents interested in teacher development are turning to narratives to foster meta-cognitive reflections, reexamination of assumptions, and shed light on implicit beliefs about teaching and learning. Hinchman and Hinchman's (1997) definition of narrative is used when depicting teachers' stories:

Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful

way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/ or people's experiences of it. (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvi).

Temporality, meaning, and social encounter are three common features of the previous definition, also referenced as the triadic nature of stories. Goodson & Gill (2011) further explicate these features by noting that these qualities -temporality, meaning and social encounter- characterize the nature of narratives (stories) as used in this study. They share a common assumption that there is a connection between "life as it is lived and life as told in personal narratives" (p.4). Goodson & Gill (2011) define temporality by establishing that (a) "all narratives encompass a sequence of events", meaning is defined as (b) "all the personal significance and meaning[s] are externalized through the telling of lived experiences", and social encounters because (c) "all narratives are told to an audience and will inevitably be shaped by the relationship between teller and the listener" (p.4). These three features are salient in teachers' stories and evidenced by our own examination of our participants' process of self-discovery, inquiry and growth.

Narratives and Counter-Narratives

More attention needs to be devoted to the appearance of counter-narratives within narratives in life histories research. Milner and Howard (2013, pg. 542) consider narratives and counter-narratives as valuable research tools with teacher populations, as they provide a means of elaborating and sharing lived experiences. Especially noticeable is the presence of counter-narratives within teachers' life stories and histories, which are defined as narrative spaces in which narrators share their experiences in ways they have never done before. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues in favor of counter-narratives as a means to study and define realities that are juxtaposed to prevalent narratives. Counter-narratives open doors to disruptions and re-interpretations of reality as expressed through pervasive, socially accepted stories.

Life Histories Approach

Life histories research and life historians study individuals' life experiences, understandings and analysis of the social contexts in which they live (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Musson, 1998). Bathmaker (2010) explains that life histories research affords researchers the opportunity to understand individuals' learning processes and explore their relationship to identity and power development. The study of individual's stories specifically placed within a setting, time and historical contexts affords the researcher the analysis of concepts such as individual agency and social structure (Bathmaker, 2010; Goodson, 2013; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Musson, 1998). By means of telling their life stories individuals, in this case, teachers, get the

opportunity to give “voice” to their realities, which might be otherwise unnoticed and marginalized. Thus, this approach gives individuals a unique opportunity to develop individual agency and a more subjective interpretation of themselves and their realities (Bathmaker, 2010; Musson, 1998).

Methodology

Narrative Research

Narrative as method of research implies the use of procedures to analyze stories lived and told by individuals, both in oral and written form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Personal teachers’ stories, or teachers’ autobiographies, are used as a tool in educational research and professional development. Narratives afford individuals, in this case, teachers, the opportunity to analyze their past and present experiences, re-analyze their positions within the social contexts in which they live and express their individual and subjective interpretation of the circumstances in which they live (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hale, Snow-Gerono, & Morales, 2008; Nieto, 2003).

Participant Selection

The study’s sampling is purposive and homogenous. Furthermore, participants were recruited using snowballing sampling. To accomplish this objective, we worked together, in close consultation with gatekeepers who had developed a plan to identify and recruit potential participants. In order to obtain an accurate description of in-service teachers from different countries, data was collected from 25 in-service teachers from Middle Eastern, Asian, African and Latin American countries, divided in two different groups. Twelve of the participants were recipients of the US Department of State via Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) scholarship and of the Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) award organized by IREX, an international nonprofit organization that provides leadership and innovative programs to promote global, positive lasting change. These teachers came from as distant countries as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Jordan, Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, Argentina, Dominican Republic and Haiti and attended professional development courses at the largest metropolitan public research university in a southeastern state in USA for six weeks. The other thirteen participants were non-funded in-service EFL teachers during data collection. They come from South American countries (Argentina, Brazil and Chile).

Demographic Analysis

A total number of twenty-five in-service teachers participated in the study. Statistical frequency indicates that the majority are middle aged as shown by the Median results ($M=40.32$), and consequently traversing the middle stage of their careers (see Figure 1).

The majority (80%) are females and (20%) are males (see Figure 2) and come from as diverse countries as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Jordan, Argentina, Cote d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Egypt, Brazil and Chile (see Figure 3).

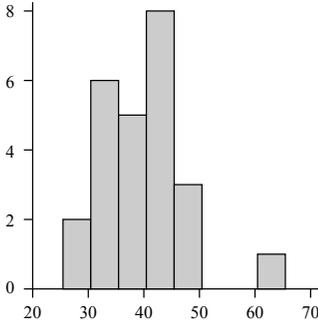


Figure 1.

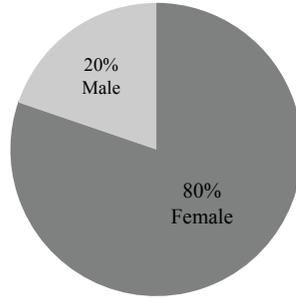


Figure 2.

Figure 1. Participants' age frequency.

Figure 2. Participants' gender distribution

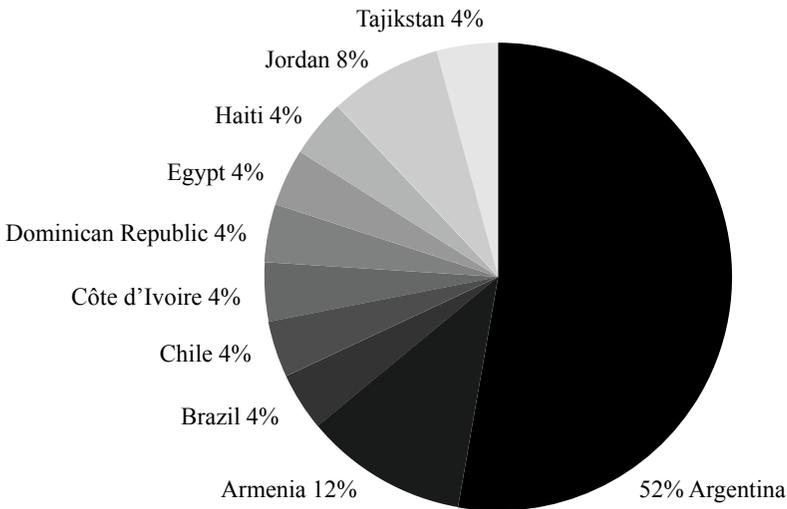


Figure 3. Participants' country distribution

Instruments for Data Collection

The main instruments designed for data collection were: (a) a questionnaire that elicited information about participants' university career selection, their support system during the process, and other factors that might have influenced their career choice, and (b) a supporting demographic information outline designed to elicit participant's name, age,

gender and country of origin. Both documents were distributed onsite and via online and were complete in written form.

Data Collection Procedures

Both groups of participants were provided with an informed consent, explained the study's objectives and invited to answer the questionnaire explained above. In-service teachers were provided with a non-threatening space where they could compose narratives and counter-narratives about their previous and present lived experiences. These responses were triggered by the questionnaire thus providing the researchers with deep insight into the factors that influenced their career decision-making.

Results

In order to answer the research questions posed, researchers conducted a thematic analysis as discussed by Riesman (2008). Participants' narratives referred to factors that influenced their career decision within the following themes:

1. Personal realization, including regard for the English language, interest in teaching, ability in English and teacher agency
2. Community connections (support system) which include landmark conversations with meaningful people and having a background of teaching models
3. Access to education demonstrated in their ample possibilities to choose a university career.

Participants used counter-narratives in their stories. By means of counter-narratives, teachers explain their choice of a teaching career in EFL. In some cases, counter narratives were used to explain teaching as a *fallback* career as well as to express other important *counter* messages.

Discussion

In this section, the research questions (1) *What are the reasons that shape individuals' decisions to become EFL teachers?* and (2) *How, if at all, EFL teachers used narratives and counter narratives to refer to their career choice?* are addressed via the analysis of the emergent themes.

Personal Realization

In-service teachers reflect about their process of personal realization and agency development as they analyze their process of choosing to become EFL teachers. During

this process, they focus on themselves and their preferences and abilities while reflecting about choosing the teaching profession in EFL. The emerging themes within this area are the following:

Regard for the English language. Participants express their regard for the English language by referencing degrees when referring to their liking of the language. Twelve participants express their interest for different features of the language, its literature and culture.

“I selected my university career because I realized I loved English language over any and every other subject (...).”

Participant 2 (Amanda, Argentina, female, 45 years old)

“I liked English language and English culture”

Participant 7 (Tatevik, Armenia, female, 32 years old)

Interest or passion in teaching English. Participants expressed their passion for teaching as one of the reasons for choosing the teaching career. Among eight participants, some express their “liking” and others their “interest” for teaching English.

“I enjoy teaching English, so I decided to become a teacher.”

Participant 8 (Anush, Armenia, female, 34 years old)

“(...) I joined the college of education, I think I had a passion to be a teacher (...).”

Participant 17 (Ahmet, Egypt, male, 40 years old)

More specifically within this group, three participants express their interest for teaching based on the interaction with students, (Part. 19), while two other participants express altruistic reasons for having chosen the teaching career (Part. 22 and 23).

“This is what I have been doing since 2003 and I love it. I love being amongst teachers, sharing and learning with them. I had the chance to work with teachers for the last 10 years and I can say this is really fulfilling for me.”

Participant 19 (Daniela, Brazil, female, 39 years old)

“(...) I always wanted to help others to learn.”

Participant 22 (Sandra, Chile, female, 45 years old)

“(...) when I have students that struggle with the language I try to encourage them if I see they have the ability (...)”

Participant 23 (Silvia, Argentina, female, 45 years old)

Skills in the English language. Among the participants, seven claimed they had skills in the English language which conformed a backup for their choice of career.

“I selected to learn English I just because I was good at English.”

Participant 13 (Koffi, Cote d’Ivoire, male, 37 years old)

(father knew and said) “(...) you love English and you are very good in this subject its (she) best for you (...)”

Participant 12 (Hanadi, Jordan, female, 30 years old)

Within this group, four participants expressed their confidence in their English skills because they had been learning the language for a long time (Part. 4). English was also considered useful for participants to develop different other careers, apart from teaching (Part. 5).

“(...) I thought English wouldn't be a hard career because I already knew a lot after 9 years of studying the language (...)”

Participant 4 (Eugenia, Argentina, female, 46 years old)

“(...) At that moment I had clear in mind I wanted to be a translator, to work for a big international company (...)”

Participant 5 (Lucia, Argentina, female, 35 years old)

Teacher agency. Thirteen participants expressed their positionality as regards to their choices. They are proud of having chosen their career path by themselves, independent from their community’s influences. The researchers used Beauchamp & Thomas’ (2009) definition of agency as the interest and pursuit of professional development and learning opportunities according to teachers’ own objectives (p. 181).

“(...) I was completely sure of being a teacher. I wanted to feel the experience of being in front of a class. I wanted to interact with children (...)”

Participant 3 (Guadalupe, Argentina, female, 45 years old)

“(…) when I was in the 9th grade I knew for sure I wanted to become an English teacher because I happened to meet my teacher while she was speaking to a foreigner (as regards family’s influence) (…) I decided by myself.”

Participant 11 (Armenuhi, Armenia, female, 37 years old)

Community Connections: Support System

Landmark conversations. There was a general belief among participants that they were immersed in a solid support system composed of family, near relatives and friends, which they consulted with when making their career decision. Among the participants, nine identified having had landmark conversations that had provided them with reassurance with their careers and career choices.

“(…) I remember that I had failed an exam, something that surprised her (a mentor in teacher education program) very much since I was doing it very well and I studied very hard. She called me and had a few words with me. Those words made me change my mind. Since I felt frustrated I wanted to quit the career. She didn’t know anything about it but she talked to me at the right time. She said that learning a language was like learning a musical instrument, you need to have the ability, your hearing is essential. She also told me that she could observe—according to her vast teaching experience—that some students didn't have that capacity, they insisted on learning English and in the end they failed. She concluded by saying “You can play a musical instrument, I bet you can (…).”

Participant 23 (Silvia, Argentina, female, 45 years old)

“(…) My mother is a teacher too so she always helps me with her advice concerning methodology or pedagogy. We discuss my school teaching with her almost every day. I ask for advice especially when having some challenges and her recommendation usually is to be patient as I deal with teenagers (…).”

Participant 8 (Anush, Armenia, female, 34 years old)

Background of teaching models. A group of nine teachers referenced their positive background experiences with previous teachers, among which there may be family members whom they would like to imitate.

“(…) I selected my career following the career of my father and my English

teacher (...).”

Participant 9 (Sana, Jordan, female, 38 years old)

“(...) and an additional inspiration was my teacher, whose ease with teaching skills made her a model for me to follow (...).”

Participant 2 (Amanda, Argentina, female, 45 years old)

Access to Education

Choices of university careers. During the process of decision- making, eleven participants explained their ability to have and make choices where they “selected” their teaching career. Participants explained that having the possibility to choose gave them freedom to make informed judgments regarding their career choice.

“I decided to narrow my spectrum of possibilities to three choices: architecture, odontology or English. What??!! How can a single person have so different orientations? You must be wondering how it is possible that the three choice do not even being to the same field of at least to have something in common (...).”

Participant 5 (Lucia, Argentina, female, 35 years old)

“I had many choices in mind. First, I wanted to be a farming engineer as my husband was going to start university and at that moment (...) Second choice was chemistry (...) also discarded. Then I went for teaching (...).”

Participant 21 (Liliana, Argentina, female, 50 years old)

The second research question asked how, if at all, EFL teachers used narratives and counter narratives to refer to their career choice. The following discussion includes the thematic analysis used to reference the second research question.

Teachers used narratives and counter-narratives to express their stories and life histories. By using narratives and counter-narratives, they communicated about certain aspects that had not been explicit before. Six participants identified their choice of the teaching career as a means to have a stable job, even though they recognized that teaching jobs were not well paid.

“(...) Then I went for teaching but what? Here the process of selection was more serious. I knew that teachers were not well paid and I thought: “If I study to be a History or Geography teacher I will only work at a school and I will have few possibilities to work on my own. (...) If I become an English

teacher, I will not only work at school or at a private Institute but I will also be able to work more independently by teaching children, adolescents and adults. Apart from that, English is more popular than French, so I will have more job opportunities (...).”

Participant 21 (Liliana, Argentina, female, 50 years old)

Teaching can also be a *fallback* career for some participants. Six participants mentioned that teaching was not in the foreground when they started thinking of their career choices, but because they could not fulfil other wishes, they decided to go into teaching.

“(...) I thought I had chosen what to do with my life after secondary school when I was 16. At that moment I was sure I wanted to be a social worker and apparently nobody was against that decision. But a year later when secondary school was over and I had to start with university, there was a problem there was no such university career in our city. As I had studied English since I was a child I decided to study English to become a teacher (...).”

Participant 25 (Cecilia, Argentina, female, 43 years old)

“(...) First I wanted to be a medical doctor, but my family wouldn't support me. So I chose to be a teacher (...).”

Participant 15 (Niva, Haiti, female, 43 years old)

Through counter-narratives, participants occupied a space in which they can refer to contrastive realities that question the expected discourse (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner & Howard, 2013). Participants relied on their families and friends as a support system to reassure them of their career choices, however, by using counter-narratives participants acknowledged there are many other “counter” messages and discourses beneath the official, most accepted discourse.

“(...) When I selected my career, I discussed this issue with my mother. My father didn't want me to become a teacher. He wanted me to become an engineer. (...) My mother supported my idea to become a teacher. She thought I should study what I liked. On the contrary my father thought, teachers are not well paid, and do not have opportunities to progress (...).”

Participant 10 (Fabiana, Argentina, female, 34 years old)

Conclusion

This study's findings revealed that personal realization motives are prevalent in the analysis of reasons that shaped the career choice process experienced by EFL teachers from varied regions of the world. While the factors referring to intrinsic career value, enjoyment of the English language and teaching have been identified in previous (Anthony & Ord, 2008, Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1999, 2002; Sali, 2013; Sinclair et al., 2006; Zhao, 2008) as well as this study, present results show that participants seek self and personal professional realization by choosing EFL teaching. This relates to the development of teacher agency and the importance of teachers' positioning in the decision-making process is conducive to shaping their professional lives. Sociocultural influences are prevalent in previous and in this research. Participants in this study stress the importance of establishing conversations and exchanging views with members of their communities while undergoing the process of career choice. Therefore, landmark conversations, i.e. specific interactions with family, near relatives, friends and educators, constitute a relevant finding to explain the important role family and community members play in participants' career choices and to depict the many influences participants have received from their community members and relatives.

Participants' explanation and reflection of their choice of careers via narratives and counter-narratives constitutes a novelty of this study. When using counter-narratives, participants identified having access to education and to opportunities to select their career, which is instrumental in the process of choosing their professional path. The analysis of counter-narratives allowed the researchers a deeper insight into these teachers' lives and the possibility to analyze their choices from a different perspective. Participants' lives could be analyzed taking into account disruptions in accepted discourse patterns and re-interpretations of reality as expressed through pervasive, socially accepted stories (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner & Howard, 2013).

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the thematic discussions from the analysis of data, we have identified the following pedagogical implications:

- When EFL teachers are offered opportunities to reflect via narratives and counter-narratives they are able to revisit their career choices, professional identity and pedagogical practices.
- When EFL teachers are provided spaces to write freely and express themselves, they are afforded the opportunity to reflect about themselves, their past decisions and choices, who they have become, which are their present experiences, why they teach what they teach

and how do these elements influence their future decisions.

- Classrooms practices benefit from the application of written practices that contribute to build a sound EFL teacher community of practice rooted in deep reflection and collaboration in the co-construction of meaning.
- Furthermore, teachers' professional development courses can be organized around reflective practices to further guide EFL in-service teachers around the world to re-affirm their identities while improving their pedagogical practices.
- EFL teachers' reflective practices through narratives can inform teacher educators and teacher education programs' designers about the need to afford teachers with writing activities. These non-threatening activities allow practicing teachers to revisit and reflect on the experiences while inquiring about the influential role that their background, past experiences and career choices play in their teacher identity development process.
- Teacher educators and teacher education programs' designers benefit from understanding teachers' career choices in order to better inform teacher education programs.

Limitations of the Study and Areas for Further Research

The main limitation of this study is related to data collected via written narratives and stories triggered by a questionnaire. These data have been collected via on site and remote administration from in-service teachers from countries where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Researchers gathered data from twenty-five in-service teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), thus the results are not generalizable at this stage. It is the hope of the researchers that the study can be replicated with new teacher samples.

Areas for further research include reflexive practices in teacher development courses, middle career EFL teachers' problems and concerns, dialogic interactions among teachers' communities and the building of deep-rooted teachers' communities of practice.

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