

## **Inquiring Pre-service Teachers' Narratives on Language Policy and Identity during their Practicum**

### **Investigando narrativas de docentes en formación sobre política lingüística e identidad durante su práctica**

**Juan Carlos Montoya López<sup>1</sup>**

**Ayda Vanessa Mosquera Andrade<sup>2</sup>**

**Oscar Alberto Peláez Henao<sup>3</sup>**

#### **Abstract**

This narrative inquiry aims to unveil the incorporation of policy agency within the construction of teacher identity of pre-service teachers in their academic practicums. Drawing on a critical-sociocultural approach to narrative inquiry, language policy, and teacher identity, the narratives of five students of an English teaching program in Medellín, Colombia, were examined. Their reflections

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Carlos Montoya holds a Master's in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning at Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín. He is a researcher in foreign language policies and member of the research group GIAE. He works as a language teacher and teacher educator at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó and Universidad de Antioquia.

[juan.montoyazc@udea.edu.co](mailto:juan.montoyazc@udea.edu.co)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2159-164X>.

<sup>2</sup> Ayda Vanessa Mosquera is an advance student at the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó in Medellín. Currently, she is a founder member of the Student Research Group on Foreign Language Police from the same university. She works as English Teachers for kinder garden students and adults.

[ayda.mosqueraan@amigo.edu.co](mailto:ayda.mosqueraan@amigo.edu.co)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5341-7166>

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Peláez is a teacher educator and researcher in the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, Medellín. He is a member of the Evaluation and Action Research Group in Foreign Languages (GIAE), Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín. He researches and publishes in the area of Foreign Language Policy.

[oscar.pelaezhe@amigo.edu.co](mailto:oscar.pelaezhe@amigo.edu.co)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3202-036X>

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and decision making on foreign language policies regulating their pedagogical practices at various schools show their social and critical awareness. Teaching represents a high moral load for them as they embrace a humanistic perspective. However, their narratives also pose challenges to language teaching programs in helping pre-service teachers to build micropolitical agency supported on solid theoretical knowledge to participate in policymaking. On the one hand, their narrations of the policy appropriation process they undertook show their frustration and disappointment in trying to participate when policy structures and other policy arbiters were close to them. On the other hand, when policy structures and arbiters openly allowed their policy participation, their actions and reflections focused on methodological concerns but rarely addressed social or critical awareness regarding curriculum design and development. Therefore, supporting pre-service teachers in strengthening their identities with solid theoretical constructs should be a priority because they will build micropolitical agency to overcome political tensions and negotiate their policy participation.

*Keywords:* agency, language policy, narrative inquiry, pedagogical practicum, policy appropriation, pre-service teacher, teacher identity

## Resumen

Esta investigación narrativa tiene como objetivo develar la incorporación de la agencia política dentro de la construcción de identidad docente de los docentes en formación en sus prácticas académicas. Partiendo de un enfoque crítico-sociocultural de investigación narrativa, política lingüística e identidad del maestro, se analizaron las narraciones de cinco estudiantes de una licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras con énfasis en inglés en Medellín. Sus reflexiones y decisiones sobre las políticas de lenguas extranjeras que regulan sus prácticas pedagógicas en varias escuelas muestran su conciencia social y crítica. La enseñanza representa una gran carga moral para ellos, pues adoptan una perspectiva humanista. Sin embargo, sus narrativas también plantean desafíos a los programas de enseñanza de idiomas al ayudar a los docentes en formación a construir una agencia micropolítica apoyada en conocimientos teóricos sólidos para participar en la creación de políticas. Por un lado, sus narraciones sobre el proceso de apropiación de políticas muestran su frustración y desilusión al intentar participar cuando las estructuras de políticas y otros árbitros de políticas se les cerraban. Por otro lado, cuando las estructuras políticas y los árbitros permitían abiertamente su participación política, sus acciones y reflexiones se centran en preocupaciones metodológicas, pero rara vez abordan la conciencia social o crítica con respecto al diseño y desarrollo del currículo. Por lo tanto, apoyar a los docentes en formación en el fortalecimiento de sus identidades con construcciones teóricas sólidas debería ser una prioridad porque construirán una agencia micropolítica para superar las tensiones políticas y negociar su participación política.

*Palabras clave:* agencia, política lingüística, investigación narrativa, práctica pedagógica, docente en formación, apropiación de políticas, identidad docente

## Introduction

To respond to global demands, Colombia has implemented educational reforms in agreement with international organizations. In 2018, the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) accepted the Country as its 37th member. However, the OECD Better Life Index presents Colombian education ranking under the average. Only 54% of adults have completed upper secondary education when the OECD average is 78%. Students scored 410 in literacy, mathematics, and sciences when other OECD students score 486. This picture of the nation's education achievements disappoints despite two decades of reforms.

Colombia's education reforms have emphasized foreign language policies. Several programs and actions have been implemented to strengthen English teaching and learning for a more competitive country able to join the global market (Peláez & Usma, 2017). From the National Plan of Bilingualism 2004-2019 to Bilingual Colombia 2014-2018, the government has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, issued The Basic English Standards, the Basic Learning Rights, the Suggested English Language Curriculum Structure, a series of audiovisual material, and the Law of Bilingualism 1651 of 2013, and imported foreign teachers of English.

Besides the school system, foreign language teaching programs have been reformed. The reform followed the report: *Tras la Excelencia Docente* (In Pursuit of Teacher Excellence) issued by the *Compartir* foundation in 2014, highlighting the flaws in teachers' profile, education, and job conditions. The report denounces the low performance of student-teachers on the national tests PruebasSaber 11 and Pro (pp. 24, 27). It advocates for an emphasis on practice in teacher education (p. 6). It also acknowledges the difficult job conditions and low prestige and appreciation affecting school teachers. The report's logic goes from improving teacher education quality to dwindling social inequality and raising Colombian education quality to international standards (p. 7).

In response, the government proposed mandatory high-quality accreditation for teacher education programs in Article 222 of Law 1753 of 2015, National Plan 2014-2018: *Todos por un nuevo País*. In 2015, the government issued Decree 2450 to regulate the granting of the accreditation and, in 2017, issued Resolution 18583. The reform aimed to improve teacher education quality by normalizing program names, reinforcing classroom research, demanding higher language proficiency certifications, and allocating 2400 hours for practicum experience. In 2018, the newly-elected government repealed Article 222, but teaching programs had already started their reform and were in the process of accreditation.

This is the case of a foreign language teaching program in Medellín committed to educating integral human beings with general, professional, language, and research competences. Its mission comprehends the preparation of teachers of English capable of contextualizing English language teaching practice and pedagogical knowledge according to the national education and language policies. For these reasons, student-teachers learn language education

policies and educational reform to foster critical reflection and conceptualization of social problems to propose solutions.

Considering the teacher education landscape, this study examines the pedagogical practices five pre-service teachers have enacted as a result of their reflections upon national and institutional language policies encountered during their practicum. This inquiry also questions what reflection processes they undergo; how pre-service teachers position themselves as policy actors; and how their narrations map the emergence of agency in the constructions of their teacher identity. To respond to this inquiry, the theoretical framework, the research design, and the data collection and analysis chosen aimed at understanding pre-service teachers' inner- and micro-level worlds.

## Theoretical Framework

Despite the University spaces for instruction and reflection on foreign language policy and educational reform, pre-service teachers struggle with the institutional realities that greatly differ from idyllic conditions national policies depict (Durán, Lastra, & Morales, 2017; Pinzón & Guerrero, 2018). Poverty, violence, low academic skills, demotivation, lack of resources, and overcrowded classrooms (Correa & González, 2016; Miranda & Giraldo, 2019) challenge and discourage them (Durán et al., 2017). Additionally, schools have the autonomy to produce their policies that student-teachers need to follow. Under such practicum conditions, prolific foreign language policy production, and teaching program reform, student-teachers construct their teacher identities and test their self-understanding while navigating and negotiating school policy structures (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Guerrero & Meadows, 2015; Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018).

Such interplay between institutional conditions, foreign language and education policy, and pre-service teachers' practicum experience have raised concerns among teacher educators. Teacher educators as Suárez and Basto (2017), for instance, have followed the evolution of teacher students' beliefs during their practicum. Others have studied the opportunities for teachers in training to reflect upon beliefs and pedagogical experiences within Colombian demands in English teaching (Durán et al., 2017; Morales, 2016; Pinzón & Guerrero, 2018; Quintero, 2016). In the line of reflection, Castañeda-Peña, Rodríguez-Uribe, Salazar-Sierra, and Chala-Bejarano (2016) have focused on the role of the practicum advisor in the construction of the practicum student's self. Likewise, Lucero and Roncancio-Castellanos (2019) use narratives to raise awareness of the ways pre-service teachers experience their practicums accompanied by their mentor teachers. Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández (2018) also nurture this tradition of inquiring and systematizing pre-service teachers' experiences during the practicum and urges for their voices to be heard in teaching programs reform (p. 169).

Focusing on education reforms and national policies as well as contributing to analyses of pre-service teachers' reflection opportunities and growth, Granados-Beltrán (2018) and Abad and Pineda (2017) argue for a pertinent inclusion of research training in language teaching programs. Whereas Granados-Beltrán (2018) advocates for critical research, Abad and Pineda (2017) especially argue for training in research for language teachers. Granados-Beltrán (2018) argues for educating pre-service teachers in critical research instead of the training in the dominating action research paradigm. He emphasizes a critical research role in responding to a growing instrumentalization of language education and research, the post-conflict national situation, and Colombia education policies. Abad and Pineda (2017) contend that training in education research must include language teaching and language classroom inquiry. Otherwise, they warn, the last governmental reform's emphasis on classroom research would be a contradiction. In brief, researchers have inquired about students' belief dynamics, students' narratives, identity, pedagogical experiences, mentorship, and teacher research. However, none of them has directly studied pre-service teachers' reflection upon national and institutional language education policies encountered during their practicum and the construction of their teacher identities as policy agents.

To understand the relationship between the reflections pre-service teachers made upon language policy and their pedagogical practices, the study drew on a critical-sociocultural approach to narrative inquiry, language policy, and teacher identity (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014; Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005; Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). Reading narratives from a critical-sociocultural approach permits us to see the interplay between language policy and teacher identity (Lasky, 2005). This approach implies inquiring about the suitability of teaching English within pre-service teachers' morals, beliefs, and values (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Lasky, 2005).

To investigate the appropriateness of language education within pre-service teachers' principles, researchers must recognize practicum students' investment in setting the conditions to teach (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Peirce, 1995) and their participation in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Because their sociocultural context frames their narratives, they make sense of reality through their stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) in which they express their experiences as they lived them (Alsup, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018).

Narratives give meaning to experiences of a place and time (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018) because the order of the narration depends on the narrator's subjectivity (Kelchtermans, 2018). Therefore, pre-service teachers make sense of professional their lives through their narratives, enabling their building a self-understanding of themselves (Gómez & Guerrero, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018). The practices they narrate depict what really matters to them as these constitute their self-understanding (Gómez & Guerrero, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018).

Hence, inquiring pre-service teachers' narratives opens the doors to understanding their inner mental worlds (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Student-teachers' mental worlds dwell in times of contemporary policy change (Day, 2002). In such times, language policies have become a key strategy to meet international standards of competitiveness and have stood in the center of discussions in language education (Correa & Usma, 2013; Miranda & Giraldo, 2019; Roldan & Peláez, 2017). Within this policy landscape, reading pre-service teachers' narratives with critical-sociocultural lenses in order to understand their takes on language policy demands the examination of their policy participation. The examination should inform about their awareness of the possibilities to participate in policymaking, their creativity to interpret the policy in local practice, their comprehension of the authorized and unauthorized forms of policy, and their willingness to participate in the policymaking (Levinson et al., 2009). Examining their participation could explain how teachers negotiate language school policies in their everyday work (Menken & García, 2010), a process Levinson et al. (2009) call policy appropriation.

The willingness to make policy refers to policy agency (Levinson et al., 2009; Ricento, 2006). On the one hand, agency permits investigating how pre-service teachers reinterpret the policy to make new policies (Levinson et al., 2009). On the other hand, policy agency allows seeing the roles they play in the policy process (Ricento, 2006). Teachers hold agency to make choices independently from the official discourse despite institutional constraints (Alsup, 2018). Decision making comprehends the micropolitical activity teachers embrace to create or protect the conditions they consider necessary to meet their teaching motives by exercising power over the available resources (Canrinus, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2018).

At the micropolitical level, teachers' exercise of power and capacity to act define their identity (Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016; Canrinus, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2018). At the micro-level, social interactions they engage to participate in policymaking define their identities as the ever constructing site for discourses and ideologies struggle (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Within the ideological struggle, teachers self-understand and build their beliefs and principles on education and teaching practices (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Guerrero & Meadows, 2015). Enactment of their beliefs and principles constitutes their agency to take action for the sake of their ideals when they are challenged by the structures (Kelchtermans, 2018).

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Although pre-service teachers' agency allows them to navigate and challenge structures, the power they wield in policymaking depends on their position in the structure (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Structures limit their agency and, thus, their identity because their agency mediates between their self-understanding and the surrounding environmental conditions (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Given the relation structure-agency and policy-identity, the pre-service teachers' reflections on policy and the resulting teaching acts were examined.

## Methodology

This study started as a research exercise in the student research group on Language Policies in an English language teaching program of a private Catholic university in Medellín, Colombia. The exercise consisted of making sense of concepts in Language Policy within the practicum experience. The practicum is divided into four four-month courses and 128-hour school interventions. The first semester emphasizes participant observation to help student-teachers to understand school contexts. The second one constitutes the first formal opportunity they have to plan, teach, and assess their classes. The third one explicitly connects practicum experiences to language teaching theory. Finally, the fourth semester proposes a social project to fulfill the social responsibility pre-service teachers have and explore other roles within education communities. The whole practicum aims to support pre-service teachers in becoming competent professionals and in constructing their teacher identity. Additionally, the university intends for its practicum students to bring social transformation to their communities of practice.

### *Research Method*

This research study resembles a narrative inquiry of the type of narrative interview (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Drawing on narrative inquiry as a paradigm in education qualitative research in which data come from stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), this study asked pre-service teachers to tell their stories of the practicum concerning the management and crafting of language policies. For participants to share their stories, a narrative interview design was adopted to consider the oral recount of their life stories and access participants' perspectives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

### *Data Collection*

The data collection techniques included in-person interviews (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) of five pre-service teachers. The interviews were semi-structured. A set of pre-set questions was prepared to focus stories on language policies (Appendix A). Nonetheless, the interviewers loosely follow the questions for the interviewees to comfortably tell their stories from their perspectives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers' journals were also collected, but written at the time of the practicum, not during the study. The material and syllabus designed by one of them were also collected. Access to data was granted by participants after reading and signing the informed consent form used for the study.

### *Participants*

Participants were chosen and invited under the condition of being enrolled or having finished their practicum and knowing Language Policy theory. Two of them were members

of the student research group. One was in the last practicum and has already attended the language policy course. The other was having his first experience teaching and learning Language Policy in the research group. The other three participants were classmates of the research group members. One of them was in the last practicum. The other two had finished their practicums. Finally, all three had attended the Language Policy course.

**Table 1.** *Participants*

Code Name	Semester Enrollment	Language Policy Course completion	Number of practicum courses	Language Policy research group membership
ST1	Fifth	No	One out of four	Member
ST2	Tenth	Yes	Four out of four	No member
ST3	Tenth	Yes	Four out of four	No member
ST4	Ninth	Yes	Three out of four	No member
ST5	Eighth	Yes	Three out of four	Member

Most participants were advanced students and, therefore, shared common instructional experience. Only one participant was enrolled in the early semesters of the teaching program. Although he had experience in teaching, he had not completed instruction in teaching methods or didactics. This case is not uncommon as the university offers a flexible coursework program for students to register the courses that better suit their schedules. Nevertheless, he had experience in language teaching and education research because of his association with the student research group (ST1). Two of them were advanced students about to graduate (ST2 and ST3). The other two were expected to graduate the year after (ST4 and ST5). At this point in their undergraduate programs, these four students have completed all the teaching method courses. They also have experience in educational research as all of them have carried out classroom research and completed the research reports required for graduation.

## 58 *Data Analysis*

Data analysis in narrative inquiry draws on qualitative analysis methods (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Methods respond to an emergent and interpretative research design in which iteration with data occurred in various rounds of analysis (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Data analysis resembles an Analysis of Narratives because it produced findings in categories (p. 74). Categories emerged by following grounded theory and content analysis as suggested in narrative inquiry (p. 74). Concerning grounded theory, all five interviews were recorded

and transcribed to be coded (Charmaz, 2006). An initial line-by-line coding was carried out, interview by interview. Then, the total resulting codes were grouped, organized, and summarized throughout all the interviews. Meanwhile, their journals and one set of lesson plans were read and compared to find intertextual connections with their narratives.

Along with the coding and intertextual comparison, and as part of member checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), memos were written when patterns started to emerge in the analysis. The last categories were obtained by focus coding through content data analysis (Schreier, 2012). Findings were organized in two categories depicting the appropriation process pre-service teachers took. The group followed Charmaz's (2006) advice of not forcing coding into prescribed categories. The concept of identity and teaching methods appeared in some findings because participants used this very jargon.

It is important to notice that the study and data analysis took place within a student research group which demands a pedagogical approach to research. Although two teacher educators with experience in previous research studies lead this study, the research students play a protagonistic role. First, the objective of this and other student research groups in the Language Teaching Program aims to provide pre-service teachers with research training. Accordingly, each of the research states constituted a pedagogical and didactic task to help research students engage in research.

Second, every group member had a stake in this study. Both leading researchers have experience as practicum advisors and, consequently, have observed recurrent phenomena in the practicum courses and students. Nonetheless, research students knew the participants and were familiar with the dynamics of the practicum even if they themselves have not registered it yet. This made research students eager to voice participants' experiences louder during their practicum. Therefore, the data analysis was very carefully revised as it was part of the research students' training as well as frequently discussed to hear all the group members' insights the data obtained.

Besides the internal discussion shared during the data analysis, it is worth mentioning that preliminary and final findings were presented at the regional research incubators encounter (RedCOLSI) in May 2019, ASOCOPI 54th National Congress, in October 2019, and II National Research Incubators Encounter at the Catholic University Luis Amigó in November 2019. In each of these events, researchers took notes of the audience's comments before the writing of this report. The findings are presented in the following session.

## Findings

Two findings emerged by answering what pedagogical practices stem from pre-service teachers' reflections on language policy. The first finding unveiled the factors and topics

motivating their reflections. The second finding depicts teaching practices driven by their reflections but limited by the policy structures. These findings reveal the intricate relationship between their identity and policy structures encountered in schools. Consequently, the nature of their reflections is presented first, and their teaching practices follow.

### *Pre-service Teachers' Reflections*

Three issues lead pre-service teachers' reflections. They focus on their feelings during their practicum, their students' and school characteristics, and their identity. They reflect upon their feelings towards the practicum challenges. Among those challenges, they pay particular attention to the cognitive capacities and socioeconomic background of their students as well as the school context limiting their methodological choices. The methodology they choose depends on their identity in terms of the teacher they are or the teacher they want to be. All in all, feelings, school and students, and themselves lead their reflections.

### *Pre-Service Teachers' Feeling about Their Practicum Experience*

In their reflections, participants express disappointment but also satisfaction. They expose their disappointment at the decontextualization of official policies and their concerns implementing them. Their disappointment focuses on the inadequacy of the Basic Learning Rights and Suggested English Language Curriculum Structure booklets regarding the sociocultural reality surrounding schools and students' cognitive and language capacities. In their perspective, several issues are overlooked. In some cases, the booklets are never used. The booklets do not even match the school English language syllabus. In other cases, when they try to use them, the language objectives and contents are simply too advanced for students. One pre-service teacher expresses the irrelevance of these booklets:

I can't keep up with the DBA [Basic Learning Rights], because for me the DBA is very advanced for the students I have, so I have undisciplined students. They lazy with English, so I must play to get them to like English. (ST1)

The policy decontextualization they criticize also relates to their possibility to intervene. In various cases, they have felt they do not have enough freedom to design materials and plan classes. They need to comply with the classroom teacher or coordinator instead. One student-teacher explains this:

Because the objectives of the school are these, and I work here, and I need to respond to the objectives of the school, I also have to do it and get into the dynamics and techniques of the school. (ST4)

Despite their disappointment, student-teachers also share satisfaction toward their students' success and appreciation. They feel joyful, content, and tender when learning that

students use some new vocabulary, mix words in Spanish and English to participate in class or report frequent use of English at home. They also reflect on the gratification they feel when parents or students acknowledge their efforts:

One as a teacher feels good because you feel that the work you are doing with them is really worth it. What I want with them is really being achieved. It is what we want. [interviewer: is motivation being achieved?]. Yes, and familiarization and contextualization are being achieved. (ST5)

This pre-service teacher asserts that her school objectives regarding English instruction aim indeed at motivating students to learn English. So, her personal objective aligns with the school's explicit objective of teaching English. Consequently, feelings of disappointment or satisfaction tightly connect to how relevant or possible pre-service teachers appreciate the policy and how much they can do in this regard.

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Reflections upon Schools and Students' Characteristics***

They reflect upon the sociocultural context of their students and schools. Schools' sociocultural conditions can be as strict as dictating the step by step of the class or so loose as lacking any written document describing the English syllabus. The more structured the school is the more support and guidelines pre-service teachers receive and the more pressure to comply, they feel. In these schools, pre-service teachers identify the adaptation of language standards, the implementation of standardized tests, and even the adoption of the foreign language teaching approaches in vogue like the Singapore math method. One of the participants recounts:

Well, they do take into account the guidelines of the Ministry of National Education, the DBA as each one from their strong area, and obviously the policies here of the school, which are still outside what the MEN requests but can change. (ST4)

Although they report having fewer opportunities to propose, they recognize the advantages these schools offer. Schools are more organized, have a vision of language education, classify students by ages better, and offer student-teachers teaching material and training. One participant praises the insertion of language policies in schools as being a productive strategy:

What is clear is that language policies have tried to make teaching and learning English more fruitful. (ST2)

Student-teachers are pleased as well to be provided with class material, as this pre-service teacher spontaneously expresses:

In reality, the materials, the coordinator gives us everything. She classifies and prints them. Well, thank God she does it! (ST5).

Which does not mean they agree with the school policies. On the contrary, pre-service teachers rather act out of fear to avoid potential conflicts or verbal admonitions. The very same student-teacher narrates how removing a prescribed activity from instruction results in upsetting her coordinator:

The activities are stated in the syllabus, but we cannot remove any of the parts. For example, the Daily Routine. Each of the things in the Daily Routine must be covered because, if I do not do one like it is [stated] on the list, she gets angry. (ST5)

Other schools do not even offer student-teachers a list of topics for the English class. This decision exclusively depends on the pre-service teacher. In these cases, the class program depends on their discretion to use one of the policy booklets, and the classroom teacher or school coordinator agrees with them. This student-teacher shares his experience:

What happens there is in that school, they do not have, so to speak, curricular guidelines. There they do not exist. [...] A teacher replaced another, but they never created a curricular structure that would serve another teacher, and will settle in the school, so at the moment there is no such thing. (ST1)

Student-teachers reflect upon how appropriately the booklet and their methodological choice meet their students' characteristics. Some characteristics include mixed-age groups, cognitive challenges, demotivation, learning preferences, study habits, and academic expectations. This pre-service teacher shares his observations on students' behavioral issues:

I analyze that many times the students' problem is not the school environment nor the teacher, because one tries to help them, to tell them, to advise them. I feel that the problem comes from the family. They are loaded with their family problems. some parents do not care about them. (ST1)

In a nutshell, how pre-service teachers understand and face the sociocultural realities of students and schools depends on the school structure, which can be close and tight or open and loose. Nevertheless, their narratives show that they reflect upon ideals to face day to day challenges language policies entail.

### ***Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of Their Teacher Identities***

The concept of identity can be explicitly addressed or indirectly approached as pre-service teachers discuss their reasons to act. Pre-service teachers directly justify their actions by referring to the construction of the concept of identity to keep challenges under control. They define identity on their terms:

Well, overall, more than a comment, it is a reflection process, because at this time I do believe that I am still in the process of [developing] my teaching identity. (ST5)

Pre-service teachers use the concept to self-understand themselves as they face the challenges the practicum poses. Attempting new methodologies or strategies, instructing new populations of students, and disappointing classroom teachers and coordinators can be managed if they are understood as part of building one's teacher identity. For instance, another pre-service teacher uses the concept of identity crisis to explain his frustrations receiving feedback:

For example, there is something called the teacher identity crisis, which sometimes happens when the teacher creates certain material or proposes a certain activity, and then another person tells him that it must be changed. (ST3)

Conceptualizing their identity shields them and helps them to make sense of themselves in their practicum. They understand that as language educators<sup>4</sup>, they have built their understanding of language and hold their own pedagogical principles, which may oppose practices observed in schools. They attempt to protect their identity avoiding adopting practices they criticize. This student-teacher's self-understanding projects into his ideal educator.

I try to teach not in the way they taught me but in the way I would like to be taught, so I try to apply as I would have liked to have been taught. (ST3)

Nonetheless, not all participants conceptualize identity in their narratives. They rather approach self-understanding by exposing their beliefs. In this case, pre-service teachers label themselves and judge their take on language policies accordingly. They can consider themselves novice teachers, content teachers, mere practicum students, or behaviorists. As novice teachers, they see themselves as mere policy implementers lacking the experience to be critical. As content teachers<sup>5</sup>, they recognize that they are outdated in terms of language policy and rather focus on the immediate issues of their subject area. As practicum students, they can be harsh critics but see themselves tied to others' decisions. As behaviorists, they defend their own philosophy which emerges from their teaching routines, not from the university, as this pre-service teacher shares:

Then I say: "Yes, that is very useful, but it is another thing during the practicum where you have to start formulating your own belief, which might align with one that, by chance with some philoso-

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term language educator to emphasize their positioning as educators rather than instructors. In this part, they show reflections on identity which is not directly concerned with teaching methods, but with their being.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term content teachers because some of them taught content: maths, science, ICT and not language. They talk about their subjects (maths, science, ICT, etc.) not about language teaching or language policy.

phy some university professor discussed. Yes! But the teacher has to start creating his own belief or opinion to establish or reaffirm his beliefs about his practice. (ST4)

Nevertheless, university instruction receives high praise as pre-service teachers recognize its role in who they are. In their narratives, they retell episodes of how a university professor provided them with materials for classes; or how another presented the Suggested Curricular Structure for planning lessons; or how the language policy course familiarized them with language policies; or how the practicum advisor helped them to make sense of the Basic Learning Rights. Although they highlight their training as relevant, they reveal that it is with fellow student-teachers outside university courses that they actually discuss the practicum issues. In brief, pre-service teachers regard university knowledge as foreign to school life and their identity as not necessarily dependent on university lessons. In any case, identity and self-understanding also lead their reflections regarding language policies.

To close the first part of the findings, pre-service teachers' reflections on language policy focus on their feelings towards the practicum, their analysis of the school and their students, and their understanding of their own identity. As presented here, the discussion on language policy first has to pass through these three filters. The second finding will reveal teaching practices pre-service teachers undertake based on their reflections.

### *Pre-service Teachers' Teaching Practices*

Their reflections lead to the policy appropriation at two levels by adapting objectives and topics. The first level of language policies constitutes the two national language policy booklets: Basic Learning Rights and Suggested English Language Curriculum Structure. The second level comprehends institutional textbooks, suggested activities, practice tests, and class material. The appropriation of the two booklets takes place in schools in which policy structure is open and loose, where pre-service teachers can propose curriculum, lesson planning, and materials. Student-teachers choose these two booklets because they are discussed at the University in courses such as materials design, teaching methods, language policy, and the practicum. They select the one they know better and consider their feelings towards the practicum, their assessment of students' capacities or weaknesses, and their beliefs about teaching English. Then, they come out with a series of teaching practices confident of doing the best. One of them briefly describes her appropriation process:

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Then I took the DBA and the suggested curriculum and checked: "Children have to reach this goal, then according to this..." I took what I thought was the most important to them for their context. Trying to keep with what they might like. In that way, I planned the classes. (ST5)

This process coincides with most of the other student-teachers' appropriation. They assert they only used the booklet as a referent for lesson planning or curriculum design while overlooking the methodological proposal. Methodological choices depend only on

their identity i.e. whether they decide to focus on grammar structures, develop a project, read aloud, or use ICT. For these pre-service teachers, the teaching method chosen reflects their views on language and language teaching, their perceptions about their students' needs and context resources, and their their enjoyment and comfort while teaching. This student-teacher relates her planning to her feelings and her ideal class.

Among what I did in the previous practicum was to take the suggested curriculum to have a plan where the children had greater participation; where the class was not based so much on translating texts, on filling, because the truth is that it seems super boring to me; because the children were not learning much for the most part because they copied everything. So, I tried to get them to build and play a more active role in the classroom. (ST5)

This pre-service teacher exposes her ideal of students' participation in class, ignoring that the National Policy advocates for the same principle. Students' participation in class planning, development, and evaluation appears as characteristics of Project-Based and Problem-Solving approaches proposed in the Suggested English Language Curriculum Structure. The fact that the policy booklets advocate for language education principles championed by pre-service teachers does not guarantee that these principles will be carried out. They believe that following the official policy booklets may easily result in meaningless lessons for students. They need to adapt the materials to guarantee efficient instruction and successful learning. One of them describes his role in making the official material meaningful to students:

We already have some knowledge in the language; we know that this must be articulated; that each class must be connected with the other. So, it's about getting the topics consistent with one another, so that students can see progress in the language. (ST3)

In contrast, student-teachers report different experiences appropriating policies within close and tight school structures. They make the small adaptations to materials and class routines that they can afford in order to meet their students' needs. Having fun learning, repetition and reinforcement, interaction with technology, and having a feeling of progress constitute some of the needs they try to address. For instance, a pre-service teacher who must follow the Singapore method plans alternative activities to cope with students' fast learning rhythms that the method cannot match. He also takes into account the school standardized tests applied by a foreign editorial company. When the examination periods are close, he aligns his classroom assessment with standardized tests to better train students. As the school demands him to work on innovation, he brings games to the classroom for students to play with using ICT gadgets:

Let's see. I always try to use games. The games are good for opening a class. Always a few games... eh ... how can I say this, so that it doesn't sound weird? Some kind of games, but they have to do with an electronic device, right? They can either use a computer, cell phone, or any device, right? Because this school year is about giving much importance to innovation. (ST4)

In a similar fashion, a student-teacher who must follow, step by step, the daily class routine designed by the coordinator manages to allocate time for topics she considers relevant. Because following the list of topics to be covered in every class is a routine, students memorize it. She quickly reviews the routine and explores new topics she considers important. Finding extra time means a lot to her because she feels the class is always in a rush as she explains:

In 45 minutes, we have to take half of the time or a little more for the Daily Routine, and the other class time for the activity as such. And if we have time, we do a little evaluation of the children. (ST5)

As this piece of evidence shows, the school policy structure constrains this pre-service teacher so tightly that her appropriation of the school language policy consists of squeezing topics in within the class time she has. Appropriating policies at the school level in a way that looks more like illegal smuggling frustrates this student-teacher, to wit:

I really feel a little frustrated. A little, how do I say it? I am frustrated and disappointed because I, for example, in my previous practicum with the boys, I with the boys followed the suggested curriculum. (ST5)

This narrative fragment exemplifies the power that policy structures wield over pre-service teachers' pedagogical practices. Their experiences appropriating language policies shed insights into language teacher education worth being discussed in the next section.

## Conclusion and Discussion

These five pre-service teachers' narratives on policy appropriation during their practicum pose challenges for teaching programs in strengthening their micropolitical agency. Agency constitutes a mediation means for teachers to navigate and negotiate social interactions within the microstructures in which they may influence policymaking (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005). At this level, pre-service teachers may most effectively fulfill teaching programs' social responsibility of transforming education (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Guerrero & Meadows, 2015) by meaningfully and positively impacting the community (Guerrero & Meadows, 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Nonetheless, they need to employ micropolitical strategies to negotiate and defend their principles to meet their moral purpose (Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005). Undoubtedly, these five narratives evidence social and critical awareness in the struggle for adequate learning environments. Social and critical consciousness responds to the values their teaching program fosters. However, a need for a more solid micropolitical agency supported on education theory to bring transformation (despite the tensions in policy structures and the power other policy arbiters wield) emerges from their stories.

Their stories pose the need to find ways to help pre-service teachers incorporate solid theoretical constructs into their identity to support their pedagogical practices. These passed through the filter of their reflections demonstrating their practical wisdom in action (Ricento, 2006). From a sociocultural approach, teachers' practical wisdom constitutes a valued and moral way of constructing teachers' knowledge (Ricento, 2006). However, student-teachers' practical wisdom left them exposed to frustration and disappointment regarding the practicality of their knowledge and their possibilities to participate in policymaking.

Policy appropriation as they narrated occurred at two policy levels but did not account for reflections and actions beyond the methodology. Their pedagogical practices focused on pleasing their cooperating teacher, following institutional guidelines, responding to the institutional test culture, or adapting national standards. Such actions resonate with a current teacher education emphasis on learning through practice instead of theorizing sensitive topics in teacher education (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018).

These five student-teachers have the means to reflect upon more purposeful plans. As only one example, the Language Policy course presents them with language ideology, neoliberalism, social inequity, marketization of languages, English for peace, and policy appropriation. Their having actually incorporated the complexity of these discussions in their identity, their narratives would have told stories that reassure their agency and participation in policymaking beyond classroom activities (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). In contrast, reflections on curriculum design and development for social equity and critical awareness merely scratch their narratives. The shallowness demonstrated when addressing non-methodological aspects shows the lack of micropolitical agency to navigate the resources practice communities offer (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018).

Lacking micropolitics becomes obvious in their narratives as negotiation depends on the openness or tightness of school structures. The structures they encounter impact their agency as the literature consistently reports (Alsup, 2018; Buchanan & Olsen, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). No matter whether they self-understand themselves as novice teachers, content teachers, or mere practicum students, they all first ask if they are allowed to act. Asking makes total sense as policy arbiters who wield more power would sanction any policy enactment (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). However, for the very same reason, a strong micropolitical agency would have led them to take the risk and time and make the effort to negotiate.

To overvalue standard, theoretical, technical, and analytical knowledge to neglect pre-service teachers' intuition and feelings is a mistake (Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005). Ignoring teachers' emotions in current education reforms and contemporary education policies means to neglect the human and ethical component of teaching (Gómez & Guerrero,

2018; Kelchtermans, 2018; Lasky, 2005; Quintero & Guerrero, 2013; Usma, 2015). Teaching causes a lot of emotions in these pre-service teachers as they demonstrate the humanistic perspective they adopt. Their dependence on feelings shows the high moral responsibility teaching represents to them.

Nevertheless, allowing pre-service teachers to believe only emotions are needed to overcome the obstacles of the profession incurs two mistakes as well. One, teacher identity also comprehends knowledge and micropolitics (Canrinus, 2011). Lack of strengthening these components jeopardizes their capacity to take risks and propose their terms to the other policy arbiters. Besides, depending only on emotions can lead to pre-service and in-service teachers quitting their jobs in the face of burnout (Canrinus, 2011). Two, policies change rapidly, and student-teachers need to incorporate micropolitical strategies to use all the available resources to navigate new regulations. Otherwise, trusting only intuition and feelings will keep them reacting to changes. In consequence, helping student-teachers to build their identities on solid theoretical constructs capable of nurturing micropolitical agency becomes a critical endeavor to pursue.

Strategies for teaching programs to cope with the challenges of teacher identity construction lies outside the scope of this study. One, this narrative inquiries five pre-service teachers's narratives. Two, their narratives were collected in less than a semester. Nonetheless, this study can shed light on further research. First, teaching programs would need to examine the teacher identity construction of their recently graduated alumni as they now enter to play new roles in the policy structure of schools. Studies of the like should allocate more time and techniques for eliciting their experiences. Second, given that pre-service teachers increasingly experience more emphasis on practice, a longitudinal study on the development of their narratives, identity, and agency could reveal the actual process future language teachers undergo in identity construction and micropolitical agency development. Finally, further research should include the voices of language teacher educators. Their experience plays a key role in understanding the integration of student-teacher emotions and disciplinary knowledge and micropolitical strategies.

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## Appendix

Topic	Interview	Journal check list
Knowledge of policies	<p>What national regulations, legislation or programs do you know about as regards teaching English?</p> <p>What do you know about the didactic materials that the (National Ministry of Education) MEN offers for teaching English?</p> <p>What regulations or standards has the school's English department followed during the time you have been there?</p> <p>What criteria does the English syllabus follow?</p> <p>What exams should students take? Who designs the exams? What is the criteria that exam designers follow?</p> <p>How have you prepared the students for exams?</p> <p>What is the school doing to prepare students for the Pruebas Saber tests?</p>	
Beliefs and positions about the policy	<p>What are your reflections about the regulations and standards that the school's English department follows?</p> <p>What challenges have you identified that must be overcome in order to follow the regulations or objectives of the English program?</p> <p>What have you done to address these challenges?</p>	
Teacher actions and policy enactment	<p>How have you managed your students' needs and language policies?</p> <p>How are you using the support materials offered by the educational institution?</p> <p>How did you use government guidelines or materials such as basic English standards, learning rights, the suggested curriculum, or any of the textbooks proposed by the government in a class activity?</p> <p>What did you rely on to design this activity? What objectives did you intend to accomplish with it?</p> <p>What material did you use for its development?</p> <p>How did you use the didactic material?</p> <p>How does one of your activities reflect your objectives for teaching English? Why did you implement this specific activity?</p> <p>How do students respond to English classes, any other language class, and/or national or institutional language policies?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) An activity done in class</li> <li>2) Objectives</li> <li>3) Source of the objectives</li> <li>4) Grade or group</li> <li>5) Source of this activity</li> <li>6) Language policy followed</li> <li>7) Observations of students' reactions</li> <li>9) Observation on results</li> </ol>