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Walking Toward the Demonumentalization of Qualitative Research: A Collaborative Autoethnography Account While Producing an Educational Podcast

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Abstract

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Keywords

autoethnography, English language teaching, formative research, positivist research, qualitative research, teacher education

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Walking Toward the Demonumentalization of Qualitative Research: A Collaborative Autoethnography Account While Producing an Educational Podcast

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This article examines how two teacher educators, as researchers and as research teachers, engaged in a collaborative interpretation of their autoethnographies about questioning an instrumentalist and positivist research culture in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The autoethnographies simultaneously emerged from the research activities related to the production of a bilingual podcast named “Conversing about *Investigación Cualitativa*.”¹ Specifically, the authors conducted a qualitative study of autoethnographic and collaborative nature while working on their podcast. The data were individual written retrospective accounts, which were shared, discussed, and interpreted in online live meetings. The outcomes of the study were encapsulated in a major theme called *Qualitative research: The path traveled from dogma to critical awareness*, and three subsidiary themes named *Questioning the culture of scientificity from our research experiences*; *Adopting a critical perspective (but still teaching by the book)*; and *Empowering ourselves as teachers and as research teachers*. Overall, this study emphasized a questioning attitude toward building a critical perspective from which examine alternatives to demonumentalize qualitative research without falling into extremes. Thus, it contributes to finding a balance between dogma and skepticism through a dialogue between local and global research agendas.

Keywords: autoethnography, English language teaching, formative research, positivist research, qualitative research, teacher education

Introduction

We, Helena and Álvaro, have worked collaboratively for almost twenty years now. During this time, we have shared the same intellectual preoccupations as teacher educators, researchers, and research teachers. These concerns have led us to conduct several research studies revolving around English Language Teaching in Colombia. Most recently, we have engaged in the production of an educational podcast to talk about qualitative research. The podcast has three sections: in the first one, two researchers converse about a particular topic; in the second section, there is an interview with a guest expert researcher; and in the third part, we invite novice researchers (master's students or graduates) to share their experiences as qualitative researchers. While creating this podcast, we started to dig deeper into our own beliefs about qualitative research and decided to conduct a study. That triggered us since, we engaged ourselves in writing individual reflections and stories of our meaningful experiences with qualitative research. This took the shape of written individual autoethnographies

¹ Listen to the podcast here:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4PqbGIoWwBEF4rZlocjLtV?si=ogpJmZxFSDuRgO-cRpwZpg>

exchanged in insightful dialogue. The richness of our conversations was marked by interpretation and discussion, which led us to turn them into collaborative autoethnography. Thus, this manuscript itself is the shape that such autoethnographic collaboration took.

By writing our autoethnographies, exchanging them, reading them aloud, interpreting, and dialoguing about them, we collaboratively identified some issues that became salient themes that we had in common. When recalling our journey as researchers and research teachers, we identified a major theme which we called *Qualitative research: The path traveled from dogma to critical awareness*. This theme encompasses a journey with ups and downs, comings and goings, and the need to keep a balance between extremes. Along with these major themes we also found three subsidiary themes that we named as follows: (1) *questioning the culture of scientificity from our research experiences*; (2) *adopting a critical perspective (but still teaching by the book)*, and (3) *empowering ourselves as teachers and as research teachers*. These sub-themes give a glimpse into our transformations, struggles, tensions, and contradictions while we try to find our own voice as research practitioners.

In the following sections we will walk the reader through previous studies that provide a background for ours, some theoretical considerations, the research inquiry followed by the findings. We close our article by offering some conclusions, implications, limitations and ideas for further research.

The Voices and Concerns of Other Researchers (Background of the Study)

While having our conversations, we realized that becoming researchers and research teachers were not consciously made choices; they were rather areas of our profession that landed in our hands almost by chance. None of us was trained either to conduct research or to teach how to do it:

During my undergraduate studies, the notion of research appeared to be something distant, and the practice of research was almost null and reduced to only consuming and replicating the results of studies conducted by researchers from the Anglo-American world about techniques and strategies for teaching English in a classroom. (Álvaro, peer conversation, Aug_26_2022)

The same happened to me. During my undergraduate studies, I didn't have research classes and as a graduation requirement, we had to write a monograph. I had no idea how to do it. I did a literary analysis of a novel by a Colombian writer, and, in retrospect, today, I can say that the analysis I carried out had little scientific rigor since it was an analysis based more on emotion and sensitivity than anything else. (Helena, peer conversation, Aug_26_2022).

Our autoethnographies invited us to search on how other researchers have dealt with the need to (1) design strategies to make research more accessible to students, and (2) reflect on the role of research in researchers' lives.

As for the first one, Stewart et al. (2022) reported on a study in which they put together a teaching practicum course with a research component. Although this study was conducted with Science Majors, it contributes to shedding light on the need to find ways to present research as a doable activity that responds to real needs. Likewise, Walsh et al. (2015) conducted a study in which they involved a group of social work students in participatory action research to motivate them to embrace research while participating in one. Furthermore, Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2020) designed a qualitative research course for psychology students whose purpose was to offer them an alternative to quantitative research and at the

same time show that qualitative research might offer them tools to apply in their professional lives.

Concerning the second need, Lavorgna and Sugiura (2022) brought to the fore the humanity of the researcher and the personal investment they must make when doing research, along with the consequences research might have on their private selves. In a rather positivist take, West and Schill (2022) reflected on the ethical-political implications when deciding to use mixed methods. They stated that such a decision is a political one, highlighting how research might influence the realities explored. In a collaborative autoethnography, Abersturi-Apraiz et al. (2020), gave an account of the vulnerabilities of the uncertainties as researchers and research teachers, using the reflexivity of discomfort (Pillow, 2003 as cited by Abersturi-Apraiz et al. 2020). In their view, research reports should include the messiness of the research process in the understanding that knowledge is neither static nor linear.

Through these articles, we see that reflecting, as researchers and research teachers, on the very same activity that takes up a great deal of our professional lives, is a crucial matter. Yet, there are lots of angles from which these reflections can be done. In the following section, we will address some theoretical considerations that have helped us inform our reflections.

Some Theoretical Considerations to Nurture Our Reflections

In this section, we discuss some theories that have enlightened our path as researchers and as research teachers. We broke up the theoretical considerations into two main themes. The first one revolves around the importance of formative research in teacher education and our in English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular. This is because English teachers are not (in our opinion) meant to “teach only the code” but to be involved in other aspects of school life (Forero-Mondragón, 2017). The second theme tackles two implications of trying to demonumentalize research in a very colonized field like ELT. Thus, we will posit the idea of taking distance from positivist approaches and stressing the researcher’s role within that endeavor.

Understanding Formative Research

In the context of the present article, we understand formative research as a pedagogical strategy that fosters the learning process of pre- and in-service English language teachers in the (re)creation of a research culture. Formative research is a valid alternative that potentiates the analytical and critical capacities of these teachers, which not only adds understanding of social, cultural, and political phenomena in the ELT field but also qualifies their research and professional profile. This implies that knowledge construction is a research fundamental, and it occurs as a consequence of a two-way type of relationship between individuals and groups of people. In this vein, Fullan (2001) reminds us that information is what machines generate and knowledge is people construct. For him, information becomes knowledge when it acquires social life. It denotes a humanistic dimension of knowledge that has to do with emotions, aspirations, hopes, and intentions (Piñeros-Pedraza & Quintero-Polo, 2006). The social life that Fullan insinuates leads us to think of the collaborative work that nourishes a knowledge network that, in turn, requires two types of processes, namely, autonomous inner and professional outer processes. The former relates to the intellectual investment of actors, and the latter encompass interaction, dialogue, and negotiation. Therefore, formative research takes place as a social practice.

The pedagogical dimension of formative research, and knowledge creation as its main purpose, connects to our conceptualization of research as the bridge between theory and practice. Moving from theory to practice and vice versa needs inquiring into both teacher

educators and pre- and in-service teachers' alternatives and innovations to set up connections between the theoretical component of the subjects in a plan of studies and their educational and research experiences. In so doing, solving immediate instrumental classroom issues should no longer be the main or only concern; conversely, sensitivity should be observed toward the social and critical dimensions of language education in contexts that are immediate to every stakeholder.

Language skill development practices, and the confirmation of the effectiveness of those practices, is one of many examples of instrumental tendency. It is a limitation since it disregards the realities of school actors beyond classrooms. Even though those practices are usually claimed to be under the qualitative paradigm, the instrumental tendency replicates positivistic approaches to education that stress research *on* teaching, not research *by* teachers to supposedly assure accountability and quality of research (Freeman et al., 2007, our emphasis). In language teacher education programs, there is still an emphasis on language teaching as a purpose, that is, both language and teaching as the object with little or nothing of inquiry into social and cultural phenomena, except for some isolated efforts. Hence, our interest in demonumentalizing research motivates us to detach from an instrumental and positivist tradition. Instead, it drives us to pursue alternatives for problem-posing practices that lead ELT actors to unlearn problem-solving activities (Freire, 2002), staying on the qualitative side.

Our conceptualization of qualitative research as demonumentalized finds a rationale in the necessity to think of and do research that allows for amplifying researchers' voices as both authors and actors of life issues that make up research phenomena worth understanding from a problematizing perspective. It entails seeing qualitative research as a way to challenge normalized mainstream research practices that carry views of the world with no account of local realities. Thereby, claiming authorship of knowledge that results from demonumentalized qualitative research implies questioning mandates that come from above. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge systematicity and formality as features that add rigor to studies of this type, as discussed in the section "Demonumentalizing qualitative research" below.

Quintero-Polo (2016) reviewed some pre-service English language teachers' degree works in a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. His review illustrates teacher educators' implementation of practices in the orientation of pre-service teachers' formative research projects, which took place in the last stage of their undergraduate program. Such implementation was part of alternative pedagogical interventions characterized by collaborative teaching, situated research activities within and beyond schools, and a Critical Pedagogy outlook. Through those projects, pre-service teachers positioned themselves as novice critical researchers. Quintero-Polo found that these projects emerged from pre-service teachers' interest in exploring and understanding some language pedagogical issues that they had experienced and observed as either learners or pre-service teachers. In addition, another characteristic of those formative research projects was that the pre-service teachers went through a process of observation and reflection upon aspects that transcended instructional matters and were closer to social issues connected with their educational communities, the needs of their pupils, and their own queries and interests as future educators. From that viewpoint, they started raising some open-ended researchable questions, instead of teachable questions, that could guide them along the research process and condensed their concerns. The questions were redefined in the face of data or with the insight of retrospection (Freeman, 1998).

By and large, our collaborative study has led us to believe that guiding pre- and in-service English language teachers in the reappraisal of the qualitative paradigm through formative research is worthwhile. This is because it contributes to their growth as social transformers willing to construct knowledge rather than as submissive actors who are forced to reproduce sanctioned patterns and ideas.

Demonumentalizing Qualitative Research

Borrowing Santos' (2018) term *demonumentalizing written knowledge*², this section briefly discusses two issues that, in our view, nurture our reflections and thoughts about our doings as researchers. The first one concerns the struggles researchers find to move away from a positivist perspective. The second issue spins around the possibilities of other epistemologies for the researcher (and for the participants). We know that these two issues are not enough to demonumentalize research and much more discussion is needed, but it is our contribution toward this goal.

Qualitative Research: The Struggles to Distance from a Positivist View

Qualitative research has been making its way as a paradigm capable of accounting for human realities in different areas of knowledge. However, this path has not been easy given the prevalence of the scientific method, born from the basic sciences (biology, mathematics, physics, etc.) where knowledge is conceived as measurable and observable. As Bonilla-Castro and Rodríguez-Sehk (2013) point out, the scientific method approaches for a reality based on its own parameters but leaves aside other heterogeneous realities that arise in human complexities. It is then, to account for these other realities, that the qualitative paradigm is relevant. Thus, approaches known as the five traditions that is, Ethnography, Case Study, Phenomenology, Biographic, and Grounded Theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018), enter the field of education, and the field of ELT, to offer complex perspectives that seek to understand the phenomena that cross these fields of knowledge at different levels.

Although located in the qualitative research spectrum, and embracing a humanistic perspective, these five traditions (and many other qualitative research methodologies) have been strongly influenced by discourses on objectivity, validity, and reliability. This has led many designs to adopt quantitative research procedures to give signs of scientificity. To mention one example, take "trustworthiness", which was a practice offered as an alternative to validity and reliability (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Still, its objective is to "prove" that the research process and the results obtained are "scientific" enough, that is, responding to a "quantitative logic" where only one truth exists. This pressure has been responded to by many qualitative researchers who have challenged these positivist perspectives on knowledge and have generated interesting debates on the ways of conducting research and presenting results. This is how, for example, narrative studies (Barkhuizen et al., 2013), critical studies (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2012), and more recently, methodologies that aim to have decolonial approaches (Smith, 2021; Soto-Molina, 2018) have emerged in search of ways *otherwise* of doing research. Despite the fact, that, in the Western world, these debates have been around for quite a long time (at least for five decades) (Crotty, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2012), in our context the positivist influence on qualitative research is still very strong. Articles in academic journals, theses, and dissertations have to follow the strict format (IMRaD) of the scientific method. In the same vein, it is not uncommon to find evaluators of these intellectual productions asking about aspects such as "sample size," "generalizability" of the results, "sample" selection criteria, the significance of the data, and members' check procedures, to mention a few examples.

² According to Santos (2018), written knowledge is monumental knowledge in the sense that it is constructed as the only possible truth where there is no room for conversation, let alone, or contestation (p. 11)

The Place of the Researcher: The Possibilities of Other Epistemologies for the Researcher (and for the Participants).

As mentioned above, even though the qualitative paradigm arises as a response to the limitations of the quantitative paradigm to study all the phenomena of human nature, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), the former continues to adopt processes and elements that mirror the quantitative paradigm. This is the case of the place of the researcher. From a positivist perspective, it is the researcher who makes all the decisions and has all the knowledge about what is going to be investigated, how, where, and with whom. Within the qualitative paradigm, a few researchers have sought to minimize this controlling role. We could mention methodologies that have emerged from the Global South such as *participatory action research* (Fals-Borda, 1987). As its name indicates, the research arises within the communities, and they are the ones that plan, design, implement, and conduct research. A similar design, which is very popular in education and particularly in ELT, is Action Research. We find ourselves, then, in a context where the researcher is demanded a traditional role of control, asepsis, and supposed *objectivity* so that the investigation is reliable and valid.

As researchers and research teachers, we embrace Vasilachis' (2009) *epistemology of the knowing subject* (the researcher) and *epistemology of the known subject* (the participant). These two epistemologies complement each other in the sense that each speaks from a different place, yet one that acknowledges and respects the other. These epistemologies imply that the researcher will not impose their plans, ideas, categories, and own epistemologies on the participants. Conversely, both will engage in a dialogic relationship toward the construction and production of knowledge. In this vein, once the researcher gets rid of their presupposed superiority, the whole research process changes since it will not be accommodated to the needs, theories, and objectives of the researcher, but it will have to respond to those of the participants too.

Our Research Doings (Qualitative Inquiry)

We conducted a qualitative study of autoethnographic and collaborative type. While working on our podcast, our intention as researchers and teacher educators was to detach from an instrumental tendency of qualitative research in ELT. Challenging the effectiveness of product-oriented instructional practices led us to explore ways to describe, interpret, and explain our bottom-up research agendas. Our agendas strive to transform a research culture typically mandated by the Anglo-North American paradigm. In this train of thought, an outcome of our exploration and interests in using data narrating our own lived experiences that related the personal with the cultural (Richardson, et al., 2005) was *autoethnography* (p. 532). We learned that autoethnography, epistemologically speaking, is related to the fact that individuals lives can account for the contexts in which they live, as well as the historical periods that they go through during their existence. We also decided to add an interpersonal approach to our study in the frame of social, cultural, and political beliefs and practices of qualitative research. That is how a collaborative component became useful for our purposes. Engaging in autoethnography collaboratively was not as paradoxical (Chang et al., 2013) as it may appear; conversely, it was an unorthodox approach that helped us to reconstruct personal meaningful experiences and verbalize our concerns in an interpersonal and sharing atmosphere.

We engaged ourselves in reflecting upon our individual meaningful life experiences as teacher researchers and research teachers. Then, we exchanged and conversed about our written reflections. Written and oral introspective accounts of individual experiences and communal concerns were the type of data in our study. What we wanted to look at in those data, that is, our unit of analysis, was our alternatives to demonumentalize the instrumental research culture

that has been ingrained for a long time in the Colombian ELT curriculum. The distinctions between the personal and the cultural became blurred to us in the beginning. Sometimes, we wanted to lean more toward the personal side; other times, we wanted to show a preference for the research culture, and other times, we focused on the research process itself.

Even though qualitative research favors bottom-up constructivist and interpretivist approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in universities worldwide, including Colombian universities, there has been a tendency to distort the ontology and epistemology of phenomena by forcing top-down scientific procedures. This trend has privileged a fact and product-oriented doctrine that sees intuition and introspection as meaningless. Therefore, we have intended to detach from the conception that qualitative research should be within the positivist frame to comply with the requisites to become scientific. Such intention of ours has considered it relevant to reach an indissoluble mix between the dimensions traditionally called objective and subjective, which was materialized in the research design of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Research Design

Participants	Approach	Procedures	Data
Ourselves as teacher educators and researchers in the ELT field	Autoethnography	Retrospective writing about meaningful past experiences as researchers	Introspections in written life stories
	Interpersonal	Reading each other's stories to find themes of mutual interest/concern	Preliminary themes registered in a matrix
	Collaborative work	Conversing and unraveling shared themes	Recording & transcription of oral conversations

Source: Prepared by the authors.

We adapted autoethnographic models from reviewed authors such as Denzin (2003) and Ellis et al. (2011) to our own research design. An essential characteristic of our autoethnographic study was the presence of retrospection and introspection prior to the generation of narrative texts (i.e., individual written stories). We collected our own personal accounts as well as our experiences as researchers—whether separately or combined—situated in a social and cultural context. The collaboration took place when we shared our personal written stories to find themes of mutual concern. It also occurred when we met to discuss those themes and explain the intricacies of qualitative research.

Salient Themes from Our Reflections (Findings)

Qualitative Research: The Path Traveled from Dogma to Critical Awareness

The practice of interpretation of the autoethnographies, when playing our role of researchers, was insightful. On the one hand, it led to some unlearnings about qualitative research as a concept and as a practice; and, on the other, it (re)shaped our profiles of

professionals of language education and research and language teacher educators. The metaphor of a path in the name of this category points out what can be understood as the trajectory of teachers as a consequence of personal, academic, and professional experiences (Quintero-Polo, et al., 2022). Our own academic and professional trajectory has been marked by a continuous coming and going between the instrumental and socio-critical dimensions of research. The coming and going between the two dimensions, in turn, relates to both our internal and external negotiations between the knowledge received during academic formation and the one derived from experiences as members of social and cultural groups. Internal negotiations are understood as questioning our own beliefs by confronting them with theory and practice. External negotiations relate to decision-making and action-taking in our professional practice. The following excerpt from a written autoethnography illustrates these points:

And they, *the ones who have generated that knowledge*, are the owners, let's say, of that knowledge, and what we researchers do is collect that knowledge in some way and put it at the service of a broader community. As I was saying, we call that research, but perhaps we are transgressing certain things, certain principles of those groups, and that is why it is important; and there also takes on a special value to carry out *those transactions, those negotiations that touch the human part, the human dimension of the actors who are involved in the studies*. (Álvaro, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022, authors' emphasis).

We learned from Álvaro's excerpt that moving back and forth between theory and practice implied admitting a balance between the instrumental and socio-critical dimensions of research. The first dimension appears as the knowledge with which we should be acquainted as the result of reviewing specialized literature during our academic formation. Two traits of that received knowledge are the Eurocentric and Anglo influence; it stresses the canonical inclination of local teacher education programs (Walsh, 2010). Conversely, the individual and collective sides of the second dimension entail human value, which the ones who favor technicality sometimes overlook. A different type of knowledge, the knowledge that communities build as a constituent of their social and cultural practices (Shor & Freire 1987) is the one that calls for negotiation so that researchers gain access to it. The foregoing implies that at the time there are internal and external negotiations between researchers and members of those communities, there should be research designs, such as the aforementioned participatory action research (Fals-Borda, 1987), that acknowledge both the reflexivity of the researchers and the views and principles of those communities. Both reflexivity and acknowledgement come into sight in the next declaration:

[...] There are *epistemological and ontological* implications that require *the researchers to position themselves* in front of knowledge and in front of the other. This positioning implies making conscious and thoughtful decisions about the entire process that will lead to posing and answering a research question. (Helena, written account, August_2_2022, authors' emphasis).

From Helena's declaration, we infer that the researchers' initiatives correspond to their positioning about their self-as-researcher and their relationship with the other by means of informed decision-making and action-taking to add understanding to research phenomena (Largo-Rodríguez, 2022). Such initiatives may very well be the result of the researchers' common sense. Yet, whenever they need to comply with the demands of systematicity and formality of knowledge creation, they become the researchers' inner drive to make their

agendas transcend toward sensible social and cultural issues (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2022).

This is a challenge that critical awareness and activism, that is, reflexivity, sets on the researchers who accept to detach from scientificity and dogma. Such a challenge also creates tensions and conflicts within the researchers themselves and between the researchers and the so-called experts who are the Eurocentric and Anglo bestsellers, frequently consumed around the globalized world. What is new about this situation is that in Colombia, and similar countries, being aware of what qualitative research should be like has not been enough, action taking has become necessary to achieve transformation. In the following lines, we will further develop this major theme by defining, illustrating, and discussing two subsidiary themes that stem from it. We named the three related themes *questioning the culture of scientificity from our research experiences*; *adopting a critical perspective (but still teaching by the book)*; and *empowering ourselves as teachers and as research teachers*.

Questioning The Culture of Scientificity from Our Research Experiences

To define this first related theme, we regard research as a practice that should account for local, social, and cultural phenomena in an interplay with global research schemes. We also believe that such a practice should not skip the depth, systematicity, and formality that knowledge emerging from any research study must have. Nevertheless, our autoethnographies have made us aware of a tendency of local policymakers, teacher education programs, and other stakeholders of the Colombian ELT curriculum to claim that the type of research that pre-service teacher-researchers, novice teacher-researchers, and experienced teacher-researchers should praise is the scientific one. Scientific research in governmental spheres is perceived as evidence-driven and its quality is usually equated with standardization and accountability movements (Freeman et al., 2007). The research practice itself is not problematic; the actual matter is that scientificity is an alibi for the imposition of official mandates that replicate foreign corporate models (Nussbaum, 2010).

Scientificity favors studies with global impact over studies that local teacher-researchers conduct in urban and rural settings across the Colombian territory. It is part of a concern that Álvaro has:

I have a question there. It is very interesting to see how difficult it is to get rid of the scientific rigor, but let's say that at the moment... our task is not to get rid of one hundred percent of what the experts call exactly that, scientific rigor but, rather, look for *an alternative to what for them is scientific rigor*. So, thinking about the idea of demonumentalizing qualitative research... *what alternative would we find for scientificity or scientific rigor?* (Álvaro, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022, authors' emphasis).

The challenge of following the demands of scientific research while building alternatives to study local social and cultural phenomena appears a reasonable introduction to the question that Álvaro raises. Nevertheless, we consider it important to avoid falling into extremes, that is to say, overlooking the global when focusing only on the local or vice versa. This is because it can lead supporters of alternative research to a sort of research dogmatism too. A prudent alternative to dogmatism is a dialogue between subaltern and mainstream knowledge. This alternative does not bypass the resistance against the privilege of the epistemological North, or, as Santos et al. (2007) suggest, the Western paradigm. Such a paradigm forces a view of the world that has gained authority because it results from rationality and the scientific method, but that has not acknowledged local realities and practices. In the

ELT field, it has become an archetype thanks to the submissive attitudes of some ELT curriculum actors toward the replication of studies that emphasize the technical, not the human.

In our search for other ways to educate future teacher-researchers, we have found that the tendency to train effective instructors has neglected critical aspects of teaching and real needs (Norton & Toohey, 2004), such as knowing who their students are, in what context they live, and what their goals are. In this vein, although models like Woodward's (1991) *educational model*, have an integrated approach, and focus on the reflection of teachers, we have seen that the trend persists in achieving the ideal instructor, technically speaking. Similarly, we have found Richards and Lockhart's (1994) *reflective model* centers on the merely instrumental aspect of the instructional activity, on being what has been called a "good teacher" —from a technical point of view as well.

Regarding the instructional activity mentioned here, Portela (2017) suggests a distinction between this activity, which comes from the immediacy of knowing, and the educational activity, which comes from a formative sensitivity. Portela states that "it is awarded as an error to take the mere instruction for all education" (p. 61, authors' translation). Thus, it seems that the reflective component alone does not suffice; teachers and their reflections should lead to informed decision-making and action-taking cause full change. This contrasts with traditional training models, in which others are the ones who decide what teachers should do and know (González, et al., 2002).

Precisely, it is about the topic of teacher knowledge that Helena has the following declaration:

What makes research situated is that it responds to the interests and social and cultural dynamics of those who are taking part in that research, precisely because *our knowledge* sometimes does not fit into something that is supposed to be academic, disciplinary, canonical knowledge, whatever you want to call it. We self-impose this challenge, but it is not an obligation to make it fit. I believe that the obligation should rather be *to find more and more meaning to what for us is really knowledge*, and that is where the essence of doing situated research would lie, and that is much more difficult than following the recipe of the manuals or making it fit into established patterns. (Helena, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022, authors' emphasis).

In her declaration, Helena leads us to infer that a balance between *received knowledge* and *experiential knowledge* (Wallace, 1991) would be suitable for conducting research. In addition, we reckon the self-initiated agendas of local language teacher-researchers to understand how they approach issues in their professional practice a possibility to demystify research mandates. In other words, those agendas can detach from already established knowledge patterns by taking the challenge to conduct bottom-up and situated research, thus building knowledge that is worth and meaningful to the local communities of language teacher-researchers. We understand local knowledge as a sort of *wisdom of practice* (Shulman, 1986), or as *theories of practice* (Argyris & Schön, 1974) that go beyond the knowledge of a subject mandated by the education system, and that results from meaningful experiences of those who take part in education as a social practice. For instance, in the field of ELT, some policies mandate a focus on the disciplinary knowledge about the English language that takes the shape of standardized instructional and testing practices (Forero-Modragon & Quintero-Polo, 2022); conversely, Halliday (1973), suggests an alternative to that top-down tendency when he supports *learning through the language* rather than *learning the language itself* to move from mechanical transactions to real communication, which fosters a higher level of interaction,

discussion and analysis inside and outside language classrooms. It concurs with Wink (2005) who sees language "...as a powerful tool for the creation of knowledge and justice" (p. 135).

Adopting a Critical Perspective (but Still Teaching by the Book)

Throughout our conversations, we realized that becoming teachers at the university level has brought several responsibilities, one of which was to teach student-teachers how to do research. In the previous section, we discussed how the ways we had been educated as teachers shaped our initial identities, where we were blinded by the figure of the expert: only they were allowed to do research and our role was to replicate. Later, as professionals, we have had breaking points where, due to the force of the circumstances, we have been taken out of our comfort zone and pushed to take on bigger responsibilities as teacher educators. In our autoethnographies, we identified a common concern that had to do with how we approached the teaching of research: We both wanted to teach from experience, and we decided to challenge discourses and practices that positioned us as non-researchers:

I remember that, precisely, in my undergraduate training the tendency was always to look at the experts, always those who were supposed to be experts. I say in my autoethnography that it was an innocent activity because one took for granted that what one was asked to read or what his teachers told him was perfect, like dogma; so after graduating, that tendency persisted, of trusting a lot in what the experts told one, *until there comes a point where I say but it is possible that we who are not experts can grow as researchers, and in my case the concern began to be generated because I saw that I had other future researchers under my responsibility*, but I was not a researcher, being a researcher was not part of my profile. (Álvaro, peer conversation, Aug_26_2022, authors' emphasis).

For Álvaro, the challenge had to do with his relationship with the image of the "expert" (Méndez-Rivera et al., 2020) who, in the ELT field, has been associated with well-established researchers located in the geographical North, who were the owners not only of the English language, but also of the knowledge to conduct research. As former students, our curriculum, largely influenced by Anglo-American ideologies (Castañeda-Trujillo, 2018; Samacá-Bohorquez, 2021), was predominantly built by courses intended to replicate the results of research conducted by the "experts." Since we had been constructed in the *zone of non-being* (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), in a position of intellectual inferiority, developing ourselves as researchers took us a great deal of effort, epistemological reflexivity, and epistemological struggles:

The other topic that I put in my autoethnography, one thing as a key for me, was the absence or presence of praxis —understanding praxis as the relationship between theory and practice, in the way Freire defines it—: that there is no theory without practice and there is no practice without theory. So, for me the absence or presence of praxis had a great impact on how I consciously wanted to design myself as a research teacher, *I didn't want to teach research without having done research*. That was super important because the research handbooks give you a checklist, a recipe, and a path to follow, but I wanted to teach from what I had lived, and what I had lived had to do with us as imperfect humans, who make mistakes. (Helena, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022, authors' emphasis).

In Helena's case, the challenge was to resist a common practice in undergraduate and graduate programs in Colombia some years ago: research was taught by anyone regardless of their experience as a researchers. As we stated above, research was the competency of foreign experts, so Colombian teachers would only have to follow the book. Having experienced that practice as a student, her goal was to do it differently by offering a perspective informed by her own experiences as a researcher.

In the journey of becoming researchers and research teachers, we were holding to canonical ways of doing qualitative research while exploring alternative methodologies and approaches. We experienced (and continue to experience) inner tensions to which we are subjected by the very modern nature of research (Puentes, 2014) but have this urge to set free from it; we are still inhabited by concerns about validity, reliability, systematicity, and other terms in research. In his narrative, Álvaro shows how he deals with this ambivalence:

The idea is not to get completely away from the big names, from the researchers that we always read, but rather interact with them. Here what I am mentioning is that it would not be healthy to completely get away from the technical either, because in any case, in the actual practice of research, there is something technical that must be taken into account; for example, when talking about the systematization of what would constitute data, you have to think of procedures, instruments, or in techniques to manage data. (Álvaro, written account, Aug_2_2022).

In the same vein, we find ourselves struggling with the linearity of the scientific method. We reflect on how this very same study has helped us (timidly) challenge the steps set by research handbooks, as Helena recalls during a peer conversation with Álvaro about her autoethnography:

In the books, they tell you the background goes first, then the theoretical framework then the research design, then collect the data, then analyze them, then write the results. But, in reality, things don't happen that way, for example, what we are doing in this exact project, the way we are going to do this article, we are collecting—to use traditional terminology—the data, to later see which theoretical framework we are going to use... and we fear this is not the right way, but I think at the end that it is right; it is a more realistic way of doing the study. (Helena, peer conversation, Sept_02_2022).

As research teachers we subvert the canon, we do not see research as linear but as organic and that is the way we do and teach our students to conduct research. At this stage, we have not resolved this issue. We are still *imprisoned* (Castañeda-Peña, 2020) by canonical and academic practices that determine the structure and content of a research project. Academic communities have agreed on the norms that theses, doctoral dissertations, and research articles should follow; that makes it hard to challenge established practices because there is the risk of not having research projects approved (theses and dissertations) or published (articles in well-known journals).

Empowering Ourselves Both as Researchers and as Research Teachers.

When we look back at our trajectories as researchers and research teachers, we find that we have not resolved most of our tensions and struggles in trying to demonumentalize

qualitative research. However, now, after more than twenty years of experience in these two areas, we feel empowered to have a say in how research in ELT should be conducted and taught. Our conversations made the following aspects salient in this regard.

Bring the Human Being to the Center of the Research Process. For both of us, conducting research and teaching research have as their core the human being. Yet, we used to replicate the supposed need for objectivity in research as a way to ensure the validity and reliability of the results, which implies that the researcher keeps distant and detaches from the research and participants. After many years of doing so, we are now advocating for a research perspective in which those who take part in a research study are acknowledged as human beings. As Helena puts it when referring to her experiences as a research teacher:

Teaching to investigate is for me an invitation to self-discovery. I invite my students to explore within themselves what they are passionate about, what moves them, and what intrigues them. For me, teaching to investigate has to start from the experience of doing it, from knowing that research brings a great deal of suffering. And you don't find that in the research report. You read it and everything seems perfect, there was no pain, there was no anguish, there were no tears. So, it is nice to share that with students, so they know they are not alone in feeling uncertain, lost, or in despair. (Helena, written account, Aug_2_2022).

This preoccupation for centering research on humanity also involves, and very importantly, the participants or communities that are part of a research study, as Álvaro reflects upon here:

That should be a characteristic, I would say, the main characteristic of qualitative research, above all, because we are interacting with human beings, that is, rational, affective, emotional beings; who, at the same time play different roles in society, they are social beings, political beings, cultural beings, etc. (Álvaro, peer conversation, Aug_26_2022).

Demonumentalizing here, then, means to acknowledge our own flaws, agendas, and abilities to conduct research and raise awareness of the fact that we are interacting with other human beings who might have their own agendas, interests, and motivations. While this has been a central characteristic of qualitative research, still, traditional research is built up on *subject-object relationships* (Santos, 2018) where the researcher holds all the knowledge and sees the participants as providers of raw information. Humanity, for us, means that the researcher and their participants engage in a *subject-subject relationship* (Santos, 2018) where both are acknowledged as *knowing subjects* (Vasilachis, 2009) Additionally, this humanity implies caring for the other, in all possible dimensions.

Taking an Active Part in the Conversation about Research

As we have walked through this path of being researchers and teaching research, we have grown intellectually and gathered more elements, throughout our practices, to contribute to the conversation about research. At the very beginning of our undergraduate education, we were taught that we were not researchers and that only consecrated (usually USA or Great Britain-born) scholars were meant to conduct research. Nonetheless, little by little, we started to challenge those initial learnings and “dared” to develop research that responded to the needs of our contexts. These experiences gave us enough strength to question our role in teacher

education programs, particularly, in what has to do with the teaching of research. We came to understand that we were not merely deliverers of research methods but that we, based on our experience enriched with our *epistemological reflexivity* (Vasilachis, 2009), offer our students research perspectives that are not necessarily aligned with the principles (taken as dogmas) of qualitative research:

We now see the researcher as an active agent and I think this led me to think it was because last time, in our previous conversation, we talked about how we, as undergraduate students, were not allowed to conduct research but were passive consumers of the results of research conducted by the “elites” as Álvaro calls them. For me, doing and teaching research has been like a discovery. To start with, I no longer feel like an intermediary between international scholars and students, but like an academic who has her own proposal of how things can be done. In this way, in my view, we started claiming a voice about what research is and how to teach it in/from the South, from the periphery. In fact, the podcast is an opportunity to share how we, members of our research group, and the MA students that we invite to the podcast, are appropriating research. (Helena, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022).

By the same token, in his autoethnography, Álvaro pinpoints the reflexivity we are adopting now, where it is us, the teachers who carry out this intellectual process and make decisions based on it, and not following suit the reflections of the experts:

The reflective component of these models had value as long as it was teachers themselves and their reflection where a change originated, and not like traditional training models, in which others were the ones who decided what teachers should do and know [...] Years of colonialism have taken a toll in our self-confidence as professionals and as active members of an imagined community (ELT), and it is only until very recently that we are empowering ourselves to be able to claim the right to have a word in one of the activities of our daily professional life, which is conduct research and teach about it. The podcast we are producing has been a critical space toward this empowerment. (Álvaro, written account, Aug_2_2022).

In the excerpt below, Helena reflects on the fact that research is not a fixed, unchangeable field. Quite the opposite, there is still room for change and innovation:

I really liked a part where Erika says that actually happened to us and no one knew how to do that, and I thought it was cool for several aspects, one is to discover that not everything is already said in research, that is, there are all paths to discover in research and in what we are calling research-creation. That seems cool to me because —I think Alvarito mentioned it before— as if everything had already been said about how to do research. It was first this then this and one accepted it blindly. With this challenge of doing research-creation that we don't even know what it is but we are going to do it on the one hand, then it is all the possibility of seeing research from a completely new perspective. (Helena, peer conversation, Aug_26_2022).

There is a tacit agreement among Colombian researchers and research teachers that research is a fixed field and, therefore, not open to modifications. As we stated above, it is very

apparent in journal guidelines, theses and dissertations structures, grant proposal applications, and research syllabi. However, we have learned that this needs to change. Toward the demonumentalization of research, other voices and other ways need to be included, explored, and discussed. Knowledge about research cannot be static, rather the other way around, being truthful to the nature of research, this field should be the object of problematization and change. In our former training as researchers, we were constantly instructed of the need to be objective, detached from the participants and from the data. However, coming back to our previous statement about the human dimension, showing our own wounds, pain, and uncertainties, helps in breaking the power relationships that arise in the interviewer-interviewee dynamics. We think that, as Helena puts in her autoethnography, the road is not clear, but that should not prevent us from trying out new things.

In producing a podcast about qualitative research, where the voices are ours and our students', we are attempting to democratize research. Álvaro put it this way in his autoethnography:

Creating a podcast should not be the end of the investigation in itself, but rather a way of, I don't know, like the coat rack where one hangs experiences, and general knowledge, and remains there for our own service as researchers but also for the service and utility that other people want to give to it; it is not limited, let's say, these are not recipes, there are no specific strategies of mandatory compliance or anything like that, but it remains there, let's say, available to a community. (Álvaro, peer conversation, Sept_2_2022).

In these two portions of our autoethnographies, while we advocate for the possibilities to question, change, and enrich the field of research, we also resist positioning ourselves as the new "experts". We share the learnings we have gathered over the years but do not intend to make those learnings bullet-proof truths.

Conclusions

The autoethnographies that we shared and collaboratively interpreted in this manuscript reveal a constant acknowledgment of our voices, life experiences as professionals of language education and language research, and evolving views about qualitative research. In this article, we also placed at the core of the autoethnographies our questioning attitude toward the dogma of qualitative research that is strengthened by the mandates of a culture of scientificity. We claimed that such a culture is ingrained in the education system in Colombia, in general, and the ELT curriculum, in particular. Our questioning attitude calls for our reflexivity, thus empowering ourselves and building a critical perspective from which we examine alternatives to demonumentalize qualitative research without falling into extremes, trying to hit the middle point between dogma and skepticism through a dialogue between local and global research agendas. Overall, we portrayed ourselves as social actors who are committed to facing the challenges of an ever-changing world. In our case, from settings such as ELT teacher education programs, we will continue to construct our voice as researchers and research teachers, and through it, voice the voices of those who will take our places in the future.

Implications

We are aware that proposing the demonumentalization of qualitative research poses an enormous challenge to the academic community in our country. It is especially difficult since neoliberal agendas are nurtured by processes of accreditation in higher education institutions.

As a result, teachers' hiring, tenure, and/or salaries depend on the publication in highly ranked international journals requesting traditional/canonical research reports.

Notwithstanding, one of the implications of this study is calling for other researchers to challenge the power structures built around academic publications. Of course, this does not mean denying the tenets of qualitative research but, by reflecting on what research is and means in our context, start little by little, embracing alternative perspectives, and trying out other research approaches, like indigenous methodologies (Tuhiwai, 2012), testimonies (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021), or autoethnographies (Ellis et al., 2011) to mention just a few.

It would also be an important implication to revisit our research courses to start a conversation about the situatedness of research, being aware of the *epistemologies of the South* (Santos, 2014), and decolonizing ourselves from eurocentric/modern views on knowledge and how it is produced. In the same way, local journals should start to open, at least, a small section where alternative research can be published.

Contributions

It is our hope that our study contributes to enriching the ongoing worldwide conversation about the coloniality of knowledge, with voices from the geographical and epistemological South. As we stated above, we are aware that many of the debates we are currently facing in Colombia about research, are not new in other latitudes, and that we might be late to these debates, but anyhow, as we also mentioned, research is a relatively new field in our context. We also seek to contribute to destabilizing Western paradigms, topics, and agendas in ELT in order to conduct research that is systematic and rigorous but also disruptive vis-à-vis the traditional/canonical ways of exploring the social world around us.

Limitations

Our study tackled the demonumentalization of qualitative research, and its outcomes might appear as an isolated effort to make our own autoethnographic instances visible. However, while we did not intend such outcomes to be generalizable, we aimed to raise awareness in the readership about the need to contest taken-for-granted positivist research procedures that demand replicability of ready-made epistemological models. Unfortunately, supranational corporate groups that have permeated universities in Colombia and other periphery countries demand meeting their interests, and their whole agendas remain stronger than our own research agendas. This can be counted as one of the major limitations of our study.

Further Research

As a way to follow up on our collaborative study and to encourage other researchers' partaking, we would like to suggest the following question for those readers (researchers) who might want to understand not only how to demonumentalize qualitative research, but also how to understand their epistemological priorities: What do teacher researchers and research teachers' practices of generation of new knowledge see as a priority in the Colombian ELT curriculum?

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