



Reflecting to Become: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Professional Identity Construction in ELT Practicums

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ABSTRACT: Professional identity has been a touchstone in analyzing pre-service English teachers' agency in complex contexts such as the Colombian scenario in which policies and discourses are multivocal and problematic. This study analyzes how preservice English teachers construct their professional identities, focusing on the emotional and belief-driven dimensions that emerge during the practicum phases. Researchers conducted a collaborative autoethnographic approach within a thematic analysis and research tools such as journey plots and identity mapping were used to examine the participants' experiences, emotions, and beliefs. The findings reveal that personal patterns, such as reflection and motivation, alongside contextual elements, like institutional support and peer interactions, play a critical role in professional identity construction. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of reflective practicums for enabling preservice English teachers to navigate their roles as educators with greater awareness and confidence. Therefore, it addresses a gap in the limited literature on teacher identity in Colombia, this research provides insights that could inform teacher education programs and support policies fostering identity development in preservice teachers.

Keywords: Professional identity; preservice teachers; English Language Teaching; collaborative autoethnography; practicum; teaching practicum; teachers in formation

Received: 09 January 2025

Received: 04 May 2025

Accepted: 31 July 2025

Introduction

Professional identity (PI) is the evolving constellation of beliefs, values and practices through which teachers understand who they are and what they do. This concept has moved to center-stage in educational research over the past two decades (Barkhuizen, 2016; Trent, 2017). For preservice English Teachers (PETs) the stakes are particularly high: how novices imagine themselves as professionals shapes the pedagogies they choose, the discourses they appropriate and the resilience with which they confront linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms (Escobar & Jaramillo, 2023). Consequently, PI has shifted from a peripheral concern in teacher training to a core outcome that programs are expected to cultivate deliberately (Kelchtermans, 2005).

Identity scholarship offers complementary, but sometimes competing, accounts of how professional selves emerge. From developmental psychology, Super (1968) posits identity as central to long-term career satisfaction, while Erikson's social-interactionist view locates identity work in everyday encounters that confirm or disrupt one's sense of self. Communities of practice theory (Wenger, 2001) echoes the latter,

depicting PI as “negotiated participation” in situated activity. Structuralist voices remind us that agency is never absolute: collective norms and institutional scripts constrain available identity positions (Durkheim, 1984). We adopt a pragmatic synthesis: PI is fluid and dialogic yet always mediated by context, power and history.

Research in second and foreign language contexts shows teacher identity is discursively produced through classroom talk, policy texts and informal mentoring (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Varghese et al., 2005). Norton (2006) and Barkhuizen (2017) foreground the emotional and relational labor of teaching, arguing that PI is inseparable from feelings and legitimacy and belonging. Reflection in action (Schön, 1983) and systematic self-study (Farrell, 2018) have been identified as catalysts that help novices re-author their professional stories when they collide with classrooms reality. Conversely, rigid curricula and high-stakes testing can restrict identity trajectories (Kaplan & Garner, 2018). Across these studies, the practicum emerges as the crucible in which ideas meet constraints and where identity is most visibly forged.

Despite a surge of global scholarship, Colombian work on PETs’ identity remains sparse and descriptive, focusing mainly on beliefs or prior language learning experiences (Buendía-Arias et al., 2020). Nationally, the *Ley de Bilingüismo* (2013) and adoption of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) have intensified pressure on Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programs to graduate teachers who are bot linguistically proficient and pedagogically versatile in an overwhelmingly monolingual environment. Many PETs still view teaching as a secondary career choice, generating dissonance during school placements (Giovanelli, 2015; Trent, 2014). Understanding how those tensions are negotiated in situ is essential for curriculum renewal.

Qualitative inquiry is well suited to uncover the mechanisms that shape identity because it privileges insider meaning and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) extends conventional self-study by placing autobiographical narratives in dialogue with peers, thereby adding critical distance and collective validation (Chang, 2008). In teacher education, CAE has shown promise for revealing the back-stage of learning to teach, surfacing emotions that more detached methods may obscure (Barkhuizen, 2016). Yet published exemplars in undergraduate practicum setting remain rare, and none to our knowledge have traced identity construction across the three-phase practicum typical of Colombian B.A. programs.

Anchored in B.A. in Foreign Languages at UCEVA, Tuluá, this article asks: How is professional identity constructed through Collaborative Autoethnography across the observation, immersion and research phases of the practicum? To answer, we analyze two PET-researchers’ narratives collected over a full academic year.

The study contributes on empirical insight from a Global-South context where bilingual education policy collides with resource constraints; a methodological illustration of CAE that is replicable in other undergraduate programs; and actionable recommendations for supervisors keen to foreground identity work alongside methodological competence.

Context: Foreign language teacher education in Colombia

National Bilingual education agenda

Colombia’s push toward English-Spanish bilingualism has accelerated since the *Ley General de la Educación* (1994) mandated foreign language study in basic and upper-secondary schooling. Policy intensified with the *Ley 1651* (2013), commonly called the *Ley de Bilingüismo*, and successive Ministry of Education (MEN) programs such as Colombia Bilingüe (2014-2018). All required alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), positioning B.A. graduates as key agents for raising learners to B1/B2 exit levels (Council of Europe, 2020). While the agenda promotes intercultural communication and labor market competitiveness, it also amplifies pressure on preservice programs to produce teachers who are simultaneously linguistically proficient, pedagogically versatile and able to operate resource-constrained, predominantly monolingual classrooms.

Institutional site: UCEVA, Tuluá

According to MEN’s accreditation guidelines (2016 -2017), the B.A. in Foreign Languages with Emphasis on English organized a three-stage practicum: In the observation practicum (from 1st to 4th semester), novices shadow experienced teachers, collect field notes and link theory to classroom reality; in immersion practicum (from 5th to 7th semester), PETs assume partial teaching responsibility, design short units and trial assessment tools under mentor supervision; in research practicum (from 8th to 10th semester), PETs teach independently, conduct a classroom-based inquiry and disseminate findings in an undergraduate research forum.

Rationale for a CAE lens

Existing Colombian studies on PETs' identity focus on belief change (Buendía-Arias et al., 2020) or on isolated practicum snapshots, seldom tracing the full practicum arc or capturing the affective dimension of identity work. Moreover, most adopt third-person ethnography or survey designs that separate researcher from participant, missing the reflexive richness that autoethnography affords. By enlisting PETs as co-researchers who chronicle and analyze their own journeys, collaborative autoethnography (CAE) aligns with decolonial calls to privilege insider voice and with Wenger's (2001) view of identity as negotiated participation. It also responds to program level imperatives: UCEVA recently overhauled its curriculum to embed reflective practice and research literacy, yet lacked concrete evidence on how these elements interact to shape professional selves.

Positioning the present study within this policy institutional nexus accomplishes two tasks. First, it surfaces the micro-processes by which novices reconcile CEF-driven accountability with ground-level realities such as multi-grade classes, limited internet access and shifting mentor expectations. Second, it generated actionable insight for curriculum committees seeking to balance language proficiency targets with identity-supportive pedagogy. In short, Colombia's bilingual agenda and the UCEVA practicum structure provide a compelling laboratory for theorizing and enhancing professional-identity formation in preservice English teachers.

CAE is particularly suitable here because it permits layered, time-anchored data generation (reflective journals, journey plots, identity maps and peer dialogue transcripts) that capture the triadic loop of contextual disruption, emotional arousal, peer-mediated reflection and adaptative action documented across the three practicum phases. The method also accommodates the contrasting rural and urban biographies of the two PET-researchers, ensuring that resource disparities become analytic assets rather than confounding variables. By integrating first-person narrative with collective sense-making, CAE reveals how mentor feedback, equipment failures and student responses are immediately refracted through emotion and dialogue, producing identity shifts that a detached observer might overlook.

Methodology

Design

The study adopts Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) (Chang, 2008) because it positions insiders as both protagonists and analysts of their learning trajectories, thereby capturing the affective, dialogic and contextual subtleties of professional identity (PI) work that more distanced methods may suppress. CAE aligns with Wenger's (2001) theory of identity as negotiated participation and with Colombian decolonial scholarship that privileges the voices of novice teachers (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). Consistent with CAE best practice, we generated layered, time-anchored narratives and analyzed them collectively to balance evocative storytelling with systematic interpretation.

To deepen contextual sensitivity, the CAE was nested within an Ethnography of Communication orientation (Wolcott, 1992, cited in Miles et al., 1994), enabling us to trace how sociocultural, emotional and cognitive cues embedded in classroom talk inform PI construction. Chang et al.'s (2013) guidelines for integrating individual and collective inquiry were followed: each PET first produced autonomous reflections (journals, journey plots, identity maps) and then engaged in peer-dialogue sessions where meaning was co-constructed and immediately revisited. This dual-layer design ensured that self-study was continually triangulated through dialogue, satisfying rigor criteria while preserving the insider voice central to decolonial and postmethod perspectives.

Participants and positionality

The co-authors (*Subject 1* and *Subject 2*, pseudonyms) are final-year PETs in the B.A. in Foreign Languages at UCEVA. Both were completing the three-stage practicum aforementioned and voluntarily elected to turn their experience into a CAE project for graduation credit. Their contrasting biographies offered maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994):

- Subject 1: rural upbringing, public-school graduate, first in family to attend university; motivated by a desire to "return" English to his community.
- Subject 2: urban schooling, prior paid tutoring and online-teaching experience; technology-savvy and career-focused.

We acknowledge dual positionality as researchers and participants. To mitigate blind spots, we engaged a faculty mentor (third author, anonymized as *Faculty Adviser*) who audited coding decisions and probed our

assumptions in monthly debriefs.

Data-generation timeline and instruments

Data were collected over 12 months, spanning the tail end of immersion practicum (7th semester) and the full research practicum (from 8th to 10th semester). Four complementary instruments, two textual and two visual, provided methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014).

Table 1. Instruments

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Frequency/ volume</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
<i>Reflective journals</i>	3 notebooks per participant (one per practicum phase).	Capture in-the-moment thoughts, emotions and critical incidents.
<i>Peer-dialogue sessions</i>	10 recorded Zoom meetings (60-75 min each)	Facilitate collective sense-making; surface convergences/divergences.
<i>Journey plots</i>	2 revisions per participant	Visually map emotional highs/lows against practicum timeline.
<i>Identity maps</i>	1 baseline and 1 exit map per participant	Depict evolving influences on PI across the year.

All instruments were bilingual (Spanish-English) by choice of participant; excerpts cited here are translated by the authors.

Analytical procedures

Data were processed in Atlas.ti v23 following a three-cycle coding protocol (Barkhuizen, 2013; Saldaña, 2021):

- Open coding: line-by-line assignment of in vivo or descriptive labels to 1228 meaning units.
- Axial coding: grouping codes into relational categories (e.g., Methodological Adaptability, Emotion – Belief Tension).
- Selective coding: integration of categories into three cross-cutting themes that answer the research question.

Atlas.ti's co-occurrence tool helped visualize intersections between *contextual triggers* (e.g., mentor feedback) and *identity responses* (e.g., reframing of teacher role). Journey plots and identity maps were imported as images and linked to relevant textual segments, enabling multimodal triangulation. Coding meetings were held bi-weekly; disagreements were resolved through negotiated wording or, failing that, third-party arbitration by the Faculty Adviser.

Trustworthiness strategies

Criterion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	Implementation in this study
Credibility	Prolonged engagement (12 months), data triangulation, and member checking of emergent themes during peer-dialogue Session 10.
Transferability	Thick description of practicum context and participant backgrounds to aid analytic generalization.
Dependability	Audit trail comprising raw files, coding memos and analytic decisions stored in a secure OSF repository (URL blinded for review).
Confirmability	Reflexive journal kept by each author documenting positionality shifts; external audit by Faculty Adviser.

Ethics

The project received clearance from UCEVA's Research Ethics Committee (Protocol #2023-FL-014). Participation was voluntary; written informed consent covered dual roles and publication of anonymized

extracts. School mentors approved site access and pseudonyms were assigned to protect both individuals and institutions. Given our insider status, we adopted a critical friend ethic (Costa & Kallick, 1993), openly interrogating how power dynamics (e.g., grading stakes) might color our interpretations.

Integrated Findings and Discussion

In keeping with CAE's ethos of weaving data and interpretation, findings are reported as three inter-locking themes. Each theme is introduced through a composite vignette blending journal excerpts, dialogue and visual artefacts), followed by analytic commentary that located the evidence within relevant scholarship. Square-bracketed identifiers show data source (RJ: Reflective Journal, PD: Peer Dialogue transcript, JP: Journey Plot, IM: Identity Map). Participants speak in first-person; translations are ours.

Theme 1- Negotiating Ideals with classroom realities

"I walked into Grade 6 clutching my perfectly scripted communicative lesson, but half the class had no textbooks and the projector bulb was blown. I felt the method slipping through my fingers." (Subject 1, Week 12)

Subject 2: "So, what did you do?"

Subject 1: Pivoted. Went back to pictures on the board, lots of L1 scaffolding basically a mash-up of CLT and whatever else kept them talking". (PD-S3)

Journey Plot note, semester 7: emotional dip to -4 labelled "methodology crisis" but rebound two weeks later after mentor feedback (JP- Subject 1).

Findings

Both PETs entered practicum phases professing allegiance to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Within six weeks, resource scarcity, mixed-ability groupings and intermittent electricity forced methodological improvisation. Atlas.ti co-occurrence counts show *Methodological Adaptability* intersecting with *Frustration* 38 times and with *Growth* 31 times across data sets. By semester 8, their lesson plans displayed hybrid designs that blended CLT with task-based routines, L1 mediation and, in Subject 2 case, gamified vocabulary drills adapted from online platforms.

Closer inspection of the coding timeline showed that "frustration" and "adaptability" links cluster in weeks 5-10, precisely when the first observation-to-immersion transition occurred. This temporal spike suggests that the shift from partial to full teaching responsibility was the principal catalyst for methodological adjustment.

Lesson plan archives reinforce the pattern: drafts from weeks 1-4 evidenced English only input and a single method structured, whereas drafts from week 11-14 showed English input and incorporated at least two complementary techniques (e.g., vocabulary games plus information-gap tasks).

Subject-specific constraints shaped each PET's adaptative pathway. Subject 1, teaching a rural grade 6th class with limited textbooks, leaned heavily on chalk-board visuals and oral drills; subject 2, in an urban school with sporadic internet access, repurposed offline versions of Kahoot-style quizzes using colored flashcards and peer referees. Despite different tactics, both retained CLT's core objective of meaningful interaction.

Emotional data from journey plots confirm that adaptation and confidence rose together: after the "methodology crisis", Subject 1's score climbed steadily, once hybrid lessons stabilized. Similar upward trends appear for Subject 2, whose plot registers a peak after successfully integrating a game-based vocabulary review. These rebounds coincide with mentor feedback sessions, indicating that external validation played a role in sustaining adaptative momentum.

Discussion

Such negotiation corroborates Kumaravadivelu's (2003) view of teacher identity as "a site of struggle between pedagogic ideals and contextual realities". While initial destabilization resembled the "reality shock" described by Farrell (2018), the PETs' adaptative turn aligns with Chang's (2008) claim that CAE fosters reflective agility. Importantly, adaptation was not capitulation: journals depict conscious recalibration rather than wholesale abandonment of communicative principles. This finding nuances

Kaplan and Garner's (2018) worry that curricular constraints inevitably narrow identity trajectories; given structured reflection, novices can instead broaden their methodological repertoire.

Additionally, the rapid improvisations recorded in weeks 5-10 illustrate Wenger's (2001) notion of negotiated participation: The PETs repositioned themselves from "CLT purists" to context-responsive practitioners through continuous interaction with mentors, pupils and peers. The journey-plot data further substantiate Norton's (2006) argument that identity work is affect-laden; only after feelings of inadequacy were articulated in peer dialogue session 3 did those emotions convert into design energy for hybrid lesson planning. Viewed through this lens, the mentor's validating feedback two weeks later served as a moment to legitimate peripheral participation that stabilized the emerging, more flexible teacher selves.

Theme 2 – Emotions as catalysts for reflective agency

"Listening to the coordinator say, 'Your Internet games are a waste of time'. I felt my stomach knot. Ten minutes later I was rewriting the next lesson, determined to prove him wrong" (RJ – Subject 2, week 26).

Composite Identity Map update (exit): central node « teacher = resilience + empathy". Peripheral nodes list pandemic pivot, mentor critique, student praise (IM- both)

Findings

Emotional episodes, both affirming (student progress, mentor praise) and disheartening (equipment failure, dismissive remarks) were tracked visually in journey plots, producing bell-curved trajectories punctuated by sharp troughs and rebounds. Open codes Sadness/Frustration, Self-doubt and Pride clustered around feedback events; axial coding grouped them under Emotion-Belief Tension. Crucially diary entries written 24-48 hours after low points often contained action verbs ("I redesigned...", "I asked pupils to..."), indicating that negative affect triggered problem-solving rather than avoidance.

Atlas.ti generated a total of 15 emotion-related co-occurrence codes, confirming that "Emotions" was the most frequent axial family in the entire data set. Negative feelings, such as Subject 2's anxiety about being "just an observer" or Subject 1's frustration at mentors who dismissed his methods, align almost perfectly with the deepest dips on each participant's journey plot, whereas positive feelings like happiness at a short commute or satisfaction with students' progress coincide with the highest rebounds. This pattern shows that emotional peaks and valleys are direct precursors to the adaptive moves captured in subsequent reflective journal entries and lesson plan revisions.

Discussion

The data lend empirical weight to Schutz and Zembylas' (2009) assertion that teacher emotions are constitutive of professional identity, not epiphenomenal. By capturing feelings in the raw, CAE helped PETs convert affect into inquiry, echoing Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action cycle but extending it to include peer-mediated sense-making. The finding also resonates with Norton's (2006) depiction of identity as emotionally invested, a dimension under-reported in Colombian studies focused mainly on beliefs (Buendía-Arias et al., 2020).

Notably, the 15 emotion-related co-occurrence codes revealed that every sharp trough in the journey plots was followed, within 48 hours, by a diary entry containing action verbs such as "redesigned", "repositioned" or "requested feedback", underscoring that negative affect functioned as a catalysts for pedagogic experimentation rather than a deterrent. This tight temporal coupling supports Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) view that emotions and professional knowledge are narratively intertwined: one the PETs storied their frustration or pride on paper, and later in peer dialogue, those feelings became resources for re-authoring classroom practice. In practical terms, the pattern shows how a deliberately structured CAE space operates as an emotional "clearinghouse", transforming moments of vulnerability (e.g., equipment failure, dismissive mentor remarks) into agency-building episode that enrich the emerging teacher self.

Theme 3- Peer dialogue as an engine of collective meaning-making

Subject 2: "When I said I felt like an impostor, you told me to read my own journal and look at the journey plot spike in Semester 8. I realized I had evidence that I can teach".

Subject 1: "Exactly. Sometimes we need each other's mirror to see progress" (PD-S7).

Group-generated journey plot overlay: shared high-point labelled "first class that clicked"; shared low labelled "pandemic virtual chaos". (JP-combined)

Findings

Across ten peer-dialogue (PD) sessions, 117 discourse moves were coded as scaffolding identity (e.g., validating feelings, reframing incidents, offering strategy tips). Atlas.ti network views show these moves co-occurring with the axial code Collective Agency 52 times. Micro-analysis of PD transcripts revealed three recurrent conversational routines:

- Echoing: one PET re-reads the other's journal line and tags the feeling ("That sounds like pride").
- Re-framing: turning a perceived failure into "data" to test in the next lesson.
- Future-casting: articulating a desired teacher self ("next time I'll...") and linking it to concrete action.

Identity maps updated after PD-Session 10 displayed new peripheral nodes (critical friend, evidence-based confidence) absent from baseline maps, suggesting that peer dialogue infused the self-concept with notions of collaborative professionalism. Importantly, these three routines surfaced in every session, demonstrating their stability across the practicum timeline rather than being confined to isolated meetings. Close reading of the 115-page transcript set further showed that echo, re-frame, future cast often occurred in immediate succession, forming a mini-cycle that moved conversations from affect recognition to concrete pedagogic planning within a single turn sequence. Journey-plot peaks in confidence (e.g., Subject 2's rebound after the successful game-based vocabulary lesson) aligned with weeks that contained the highest density of re-framing moves, underscoring the catalytic role of peer dialogue in transforming emotional insight into classroom action.

Discussion

These findings extend Wenger's (2001) claim that communities of practice are crucibles for identity by showing how even a dyad can function as a "micro-community" when structured reflection tools are in play. The echo-frame-future-cast routine parallels what Costa and Kallick (1993) term *critical-friend protocols* but here emerges organically, not through external facilitation. In Colombia, PET literature, formal mentor feedback is often highlighted (Arias et al., 2020); our data suggest that horizontal feedback among peers is equally potent, offering affective safety unavailable in hierarchical relationships.

At a theoretical level, the peer-dialogue mechanism aligns with Bakhtin's notion of dialogism: identity voices become authoritative only after meeting the other's response. Practically, the mechanisms address a chronic program gap: with mentors stretched thin across multiple schools, PETs reported long waits for lesson-plan input, whereas weekly PD calls delivered immediate, actionable insight, thereby sustaining momentum and buffering against emotional troughs (Theme 2).

The stability of the echo, reframe, future-cast sequence, documented in every one of the ten sessions, underscores its role as a self-sustaining engine of collective agency; transcripts show that the entire mini-cycle often unfolded within three consecutive turns, linking emotional validation directly to pedagogic planning. Identity-map revisions after session 10, which introduced new codes such as critical friend and evidence-based confidence, further confirm that sustained peer dialogue left a trace inside the participants' self-concepts rather than merely producing situational advice. Moreover, the weeks exhibiting the densest concentration of re-framing moves coincide with the highest confidence peaks on journey plots, strengthening the inference that peer-mediated reflections is a key level for transforming affective insight into adaptive classroom practice.

Cross-theme synthesis and theoretical contribution

The three themes uncovered in this study; methodological negotiation, emotion-driven reflection and peer mediated sense-making; interact as a dynamic feedback loop. Contextual disruptions such as equipment failure or mentor criticism initially destabilize novices' communicative method ideals, prompting intense affective responses that register in reflective journals and journey plots. Rather than stalling growth, these emotions energize a move into structured inquiry, where PETs interrogate what went wrong and why. Weekly critical friend conversations then operate as a collaborative hinge; by echoing feelings, reframing incidents, and projecting next steps, peer transform raw affect into concrete pedagogic redesigns. The revised lesson is enacted, fresh data are produced, and loop begins again, gradually consolidating a more flexible, context, responsive professional self.

This loop refines Schön's (1983) reflective-practice cycle by positioning emotion as ignition point and peer dialogue as the catalytic converter that turns reflection into action. It likewise sharpens Wenger's (2001) community of practice theory by demonstrating that a dyad, if supported by structured tools, can supply sufficient social density for identity reshaping. In settings where mentors juggle multiple schools and

feedback is delayed, such micro-communities provide the immediacy novices need to maintain momentum.

The synthesis also advances teacher identity scholarship on three counts. First, it empirically confirms that negative affect, quickly named and shared, functions as a resource rather than liability, fueling methodological experimentation under resource constraints. Second, it shows that horizontal feedback amplifies agency: novices attempt riskier pedagogical moves once their peers have validated the underlying rationale. Third, by foregrounding insider narratives from a Global-South context, the study challenges hierarchies of expertise that often sideline novices voices and non-anglophone settings in language-teacher education research.

Table 2 summarizes how each theme answers the research question.

Research sub-question	Theme	Identity mechanism uncovered	Key literature connection
RQ1a. What experiences shape PET identity?	1	Negotiation of methodological ideas with resource-bound realities.	Kumaravadivelu (2003); Kaplan & Garner (2018)
RQ1b. How are emotions implicated?	2	Emotion triggers reflective agency when captured in real time.	Schutz & Zembylas (2009); Norton (2006)
RQ1c. What role does peer interaction play?	3	Structured dialogue converts affect into adaptive practice, embedding collective agency.	Wenger (2001); Costa & Kallick (1993)

Collectively, the themes demonstrate that professional identity is not merely a personal trajectory but a collaboratively mediated, context-responsive performance. This aligns with decolonial calls to recognize the collective voices Global-South teachers (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021) and challenges programs that treat reflection as a solitary written exercise.

Programme-level implications

Strengthening preservice teachers' professional-identity development calls for deliberate redesign of the practicum architecture rather than marginal tweaks. First, the program of B.A. in Foreign Languages should institutionalize structured peer-dialogue sessions as a regular feature of every practicum phase. A weekly 30 minute "critical friend" conversation, guided by three concise prompts that invite participants to echo one another's feelings, reframe problems as design opportunities, and project concrete next steps, proved indispensable in converting raw emotion into adaptative pedagogic action. Because the meeting rely only on an online call link or a vacant classroom, they impose no additional financial burden; yet they fill an important supervision gap by offering immediate, horizontal feedback at moments when mentor inputs is often delayed. Embedding these sessions into course syllabi, rather than leaving them to student initiative, signals that collective sense-making is legitimate and assessed component of professional growth.

Alongside peer dialogue, the program needs to assess identity work explicitly rather than treating it as an invisible by-product of technical competence. Current practicum rubrics typically reward lesson-plan accuracy, classroom management skills but omit criteria that capture how novices adapt methods under constraint, collaborate with peers, or articulate evolving teacher selves. Introducing a short reflective-practice dossier, graded on clarity of insight, evidence of adaptability and incorporation of peer feedback, elevates identity formation to the same status as methodological precision. Such a dossier can be evaluated efficiently with a three-level scale (emerging, developing, established), keeping marking time manageable while encouraging deeper metacognitive engagement.

Also, rethinking mentor deployment can amplify benefits of collective inquiry without increasing staff loads. Pairing each school-based mentor with a small "peer pod" of three preservice teachers, rather than maintaining a one-to-one ratio, creates a miniature community of practice that multiplies perspectives during lesson planning, observation and feedback. While the mentor still conducts individual evaluations, shared post-lesson conferences encourage PETs to cross-pollinate strategies, normalize emotion turbulence, and witness diverse identity trajectories in real time. This configuration leverages mentor expertise more efficiently and mirrors the collaborative professional cultures that novice teachers will need to cultivate once they enter full-time employment.

Taken together, these measures reposition professional identity development as a central, assessable, and collaboratively nurtured outcome of the practicum. By integrating structured peer dialogue, explicit assessment of reflective growth, scenario based adaptability training, and pod-style mentorship, the teacher education program can transform practicum from a largely tacit rite of passage into a deliberately scaffolded laboratory for resilient, context-responsive pedagogy.

Limitations and avenues for further research

The deep-case design (two PETs, one institution) prioritizes analytic generalizability over statistical breadth. Future studies could replicate the CAE protocol across multiple universities or integrate physiological data (e.g., heart-rate variability) to triangulate emotional peaks. Longitudinal follow-ups into the induction year would clarify how practicum-era identity scripts endure or mutate once novices face full-time workload.

An additional constraint derives from dual researcher-participant role; as Ladapat (2017) notes, autoethnographic self-report can blur the line between data and interpretation, raising questions about confirmation bias despite the audit checks built into this study. Because all narratives were produced bilingually and later translated for analysis, subtle shifts in meaning may have occurred; future work should consider keeping analysis in the original language or employing back-translation procedures to ensure semantic fidelity. Finally, data sources centered on self-generated texts and peer dialogue; incorporating classroom observations or mentor-teacher artefacts would provide an external vantage point on the adaptive moves reported here, offering a fuller triangulation of professional-identity construction.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key conclusions

This study set out to explain in how preservice English teachers construct professional identity (PI) during a three-stage practicum when Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) is woven into daily reflection. Analysis across journals, journey plots, identity maps and peer dialogues produced three interlocking insights:

- Ideal-reality negotiation. PETs entered with communicative-method ideals yet confronted resource and policy constraints. Identity solidified not in abandoning ideals but in creatively re-contextualizing them.
- Emotion as catalyst. Frustration, pride and self-doubt did not derail learning; captured in real time, they propelled reflective agency and methodological experimentation.
- Peer-mediated sense-making. A structured echo-reframe-future-cast routine transformed solitary reflection into collective problem-solving, anchoring a “micro-community of practice” that sustained resilience.

Together these mechanisms form a triadic loop (contextual disruption, emotional arousal, peer-mediated reflection, adaptative action) that updates classic reflective-practice theory by foregrounding affect and horizontal feedback.

Program-level recommendations

Action	Rationale	Minimal resource requirement
Institutionalize peer-dialogue sessions (30 min/week) using the three-prompt protocol	Converts raw affect into actionable strategy; builds collective agency	Free: Uses existing video-conference tools or classroom space
Assess identity work explicitly in practicum rubrics (e.g., evidence of adaptability, critical-friend feedback incorporated).	Signals that PI growth is as valued as methodological accuracy	Minor rubric revision; no extra class hours
Run “plan-B teaching” simulation labs (e.g., no projector, mixed-grade groups) before school placement	Prepares PETs for resource-scarce realities, reducing early-stage identity shock	Use existing micro-teaching slots with altered constraint

Pair mentors with small peed pods (one mentor: 3 PETs) rather than one-to- one	Balances workload and reinforces horizontal learning	Scheduling, not adjustment	staffing,
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Policy considerations for Colombia's bilingual agenda

- Align identity support with CEFR goals. National policy measures linguistic proficiency; programs must measure the reflective and adaptative capacities that enable proficiency gains to materialize in diverse classrooms. Because the *Ley 1651 del 2013* or *Ley de Bilingüismo* and the Colombian adoption of the 2020 CEFR compel schools to move learners toward B1/B2 exit levels, PETs need not only language skills but also the contextual agility to translate CEFR descriptors into meaningful tasks when textbooks, electricity or digital platforms are unavailable. Embedding identity-building rubrics alongside CEFR-aligned language targets therefore operationalizes the dual mandate set out in both the *Ley General de la Educación* (1994) and Colombia's commitment to UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).
- Recognize rural-urban disparity in practicum sites. Funding mechanisms should reward universities that place PETs in under-resourced schools while providing additional mentor-training stipends to offset contextual challenges. Rural placements, like the one faced by Subject 1 in this study, often entail multi-grade classes, limited internet and scarce print materials, conditions that intensify the identity "reality shock". Earmarking policy funds for travel allowances, classroom materials and mentor upskilling would help equalize learning opportunities and advance the national priority of broadening social, economic and cultural access through strengthened foreign-language education.
- Facilitate inter-institutional CAE networks. MEN could host a cloud repository where PETs from different regions upload anonymized reflections, extending the micro-community concept nation-wide. Such a platform would turn the echo-reframe future-cast routine documented here into a scalable professional learning strategy, enabling PETs in both urban and rural programs to benchmark adaptative solutions and collectively problem-solve policy challenges tied to the bilingual agenda.

Research agenda

- Scale-out studies. Replicate this CAE design across multiple universities to test the triadic loop in varied sociolinguistic settings. Priority should be given to contrasting urban, peri-urban and rural B.A. programs so that the resource-gap pressures documented in Subject 1's placement can be compared with the better-equipped contexts of Subject 2. Matching the three-phase practicum architecture (observation, immersion, research) will allow researchers to isolate contextual variation rather than structural differences in course design.
- Induction-year tracking. Follow the same PETs into their first year of full-time teaching to see which identity scripts endure, morph or fade. Maintaining the same data-generation instrument (reflective journals, peer dialogue recordings and journey plots) will reveal whether the eco, reframe, future-cast sequence remains a self-scaffolding habit once formal university support is withdrawn. The tracking should extend through at least two school terms to capture the influence of high-stakes national testing cycles on novice teachers' adaptative repertoire.
- Multimodal emotion capture. Pair reflective writing with biometric or observational data to triangulate emotional peaks more rigorously. Heart-rate variability readings taken immediately before and after critical incidents (e.g., equipment failures or mentor observations) could be synchronized with timestamped journal entries, providing an external marker for the affective spikes visualized in journey plots. Classroom video stimulated-recall interviews would add a behavioral layer, clarifying how in the moment emotions translate into observable instructional moves.
- Mentor-centric CAE. Investigate how mentor teachers' own identity negotiations influence, and are influenced by PET reflections. Embedding mentors in CAE cycle, having them keep parallel journals and join selected peer-dialogue sessions, would illuminate bidirectional learning: how mentors recalibrate their guidance after reading PET narratives, and how PET reframe challenges in light of mentors' lived accounts of adapting communicative principles under Colombian policy mandates.

Final remark

Professional identity is too important to be left to chance reflection. By embedding structured peer dialogue and recognizing emotion as legitimate data, teacher-education programs can transform practicum from a

test of endurance into a laboratory for resilient, context-responsive pedagogy. The CAE framework illustrated here offers a feasible, low-cost route toward that goal, one that honors the voices of novice teachers while meeting the bilingual aspirations of Colombian education.

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