

Exploring English Language Teachers' Critical Identities: a literature review**



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Abstract

This paper presents a literature review on critical Identities (CI), that implemented as methodology a profiling exercise, which according to Castañeda-Londoño (2019), is an exercise that allows the tracking of tendencies in research studies. An exploration was carried out in relation to what has been studied regarding the English language teachers' critical identities (CI henceforth). Based on this, a conceptualization of CI will be briefly introduced, in order to frame this review within a critical perspective in education. Then, I will discuss how the review unveiled three trends: the first one is that some studies that relate to CI revolve around critical reflections and explore narratives as part of their methodology; the second one has to do with the fact that some studies explore the relations between criticality and English language teaching, as contents in courses or programs for in-service and pre-service teachers; the third one regards some studies that reveal how English language teachers (ELT) express our CI to confront power relations in our teaching practice. After that, I will comment the gaps that were identified in studies related to English language teachers' identities, which consists on the opportunity to understand our CI as something that is built through our histories and stories, and that has an influence over our actions as well as teaching practices inside and outside the classroom. Finally, the conclusions of this profiling exercise will be exposed.

KEYWORDS

Identity, criticality, ELT, profiling, power relations.

EXPLORANDO LAS IDENTIDADES CRÍTICAS DE LOS PROFESORES DE INGLÉS: UNA REVISIÓN DE LA LITERATURA

RESUMEN

Este documento presenta una revisión de la literatura en la que se implementó como metodología un ejercicio de perfilado, el cual, de acuerdo con Castañeda-Londoño (2019), es un ejercicio que permite el seguimiento de tendencias en estudios de investigación. Aquí, se llevó a cabo una exploración relacionada con lo que se ha estudiado en relación con las identidades críticas (IC) de

los maestros de inglés. Sobre esta base, se presentará de manera breve una conceptualización de lo que se entiende por IC para enmarcar esta revisión dentro de una perspectiva crítica en la educación. Luego, se discutirá cómo esta revisión revela tres tendencias: la primera es que algunos estudios que se relacionan con las IC giran en torno a reflexiones críticas y exploran las narrativas como parte de su metodología; la segunda tiene que ver con el hecho de que algunos estudios exploran las relaciones entre criticalidad y la enseñanza del idioma inglés como contenidos en cursos y programas para profesores en formación y en ejercicio; la tercera tendencia revela cómo a partir de algunos estudios los profesores de inglés expresamos nuestras IC para confrontar relaciones de poder en nuestra práctica docente. Comentaré las brechas que identifiqué en los estudios relacionados con las identidades de los profesores de inglés, que consisten en la oportunidad de entender nuestras IC como algo que se construye a través de nuestras historias de vida y nuestras vivencias, y que tiene una influencia sobre nuestras acciones en nuestra práctica docente dentro y fuera del salón de clases. Finalmente, se presentarán las conclusiones de este ejercicio de perfilado.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Identidad, criticidad, ELT, perfilamiento relaciones de poder.

EXPLORATION DES IDENTITÉS CRITIQUES CHEZ LES ENSEIGNANTS D'ANGLAIS: UNE RÉVISION DOCUMENTAIRE

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une révision documentaire, ayant comme méthodologie un exercice de profilage qui, d'après Castañeda-Londoño (2019), c'est un exercice permettant le suivi des tendances dans des études de recherche. On a mené une exploration concernant ce qui a été étudié au sujet des identités critiques (IC) chez les enseignants d'anglais. Sur cette base, on présentera brièvement une conceptualisation de ce qu'il faut entendre par IC, afin d'encadrer cette révision documentaire dans une perspective critique dans le domaine de l'éducation. Par la suite, on discutera la manière dont cette révision est révélatrice de trois tendances : la première montre que quelques études en rapport avec les IC tournent

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**Artículo de revisión Fecha de recibo: 26/04/2022 Fecha de aceptación: 04/08/2022

autour de réflexions critiques et explorent les récits comme outil méthodologique ; la seconde met en évidence quelques études explorant les rapports entre criticité et enseignement de la langue anglaise en tant que contenus des cours et des programmes pour des enseignants et futurs enseignants ; la troisième tendance révèle la façon dont, à partir de quelques études les enseignants d'anglais exprimons nos IC afin de confronter des relations de pouvoir dans le cadre de nos pratiques d'enseignement. J'aborderai les lacunes identifiées dans les études au sujet des identités des enseignants d'anglais, comme un moyen de comprendre la construction de nos identités à travers nos histoires de vie et nos expériences, ainsi que son influence sur nos actions d'enseignement dans la salle de classe comme en dehors. Finalement, on présentera les conclusions de cet exercice de profilage.

MOTS CLÉ

Identité, criticité, ELT, profilage, rapports de pouvoir.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result of a research profiling exercise that has been done to understand a personal and worldwide growing interest in discussing English Language Teachers' Identities. I say that this is a personal interest because the work I have done with students with particular socio economic and cultural conditions, has allowed me to tackle inequalities and some injustices in my lessons to help them to notice the pervasive of the status quo. The way I perceive my profession as teacher is the result of the embodiment of a critical identity that is manifested throughout my teaching practices in different moments and spaces, and I have observed similar postures in my colleagues, which has led me to wonder about how they have built and understood those CI. A profiling exercise, according to Castañeda-Londoño (2019), is an exercise that allows the tracking of tendencies in research studies, in this case related to English language teachers' CI, by reviewing abstracts from different databases. Consequently, different educational domains were scanned to find out the use of criticality and identity with topical relationships. Firstly, although identity and criticality are separated concepts that have been a concern in the education field, there are few works which analyze the contexts and ways in which EL teachers try to embody and exercise critical identities, and their relations with our teaching practices. Then, based on this profiling exercise, it will be presented the domains in education that have appropriated critical frames and the purposes behind the pedagogical implementations. It will be presented the articles that

have been explored in this exercise, discussing the concept of CI and how it is evidenced and problematized in the articles. The three identified trends, in relation to the English language teachers' CI will be presented, and it will be mentioned tendencies in terms of when and where this topic has been researched. Finally, I will present the found gap, which offers an opportunity to explore and research about CI.

THE EXPLORATION

For this profiling exercise different databases were explored such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Google scholar, and JSTOR, and it is worthy to mention that studies that directly refer to CI as a single concept are scarce. That is to say, the cluster Critical + Identity seems to be a little explored issue, which means that it is easy to find studies related to English language teachers' identities, and as a different issue, I could find plenty of research related to criticality and the teaching of the English language, but both elements combined are not easy to find. I started by exploring papers that dealt with English language teachers' identities and I found that there the focus was on identities different from a critical one. Then, I revised research that had problematized any type of critical element such as Critical thinking, in the teaching of the English language, but elements of identity were not taken into account. An amount of 75 articles were examined, the ones that resulted from the search critical + identity were just 5, 2 in the ELT and 3 in education in general. The intention was to give a complete panorama of what has been problematized in relation to CI and a total of 65 articles were initially considered because they seemed to give account of explorations of this topic.

After a deeper analysis of each paper, it was difficult to find connections between the concept of CI and the purposes of the authors. In the end, half of the articles were excluded, and even the ones that were included here presented difficulties to fit into what I conceptualize as CI. It was necessary to find common elements that could be identified in both grounds, criticality and identity, such as agency, teacher, subject, critical being, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical awareness, critical applied linguistics, and agency. Then, a deeper analysis of the articles was carried out to make any sort of connections that could give account of a relevance for the concept of CI. This does not mean that it was assumed that CI were the focus of those studies, but that it was possible to establish connections based on what the authors reported in their documents and the created



clusters. Finally, it was observed that there are studies that related to the issue since 2002, and that Canada, Indonesia, China, Colombia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and United States are present in this search, finding that there is a tendency in some Asian countries to research about CI.

CONCEPTUALIZING CRITICAL IDENTITIES

My understanding of CI corresponds to the conceptualization that I have built based on the reviewed literature in relation to two separated issues: Identity and Criticality. On one hand, we have identity, which are the results “from processes of (public) political negotiation through discourse (and/or other semiotic systems) within the communities of practice in which individuals participate” (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012, p.33). Zembylas (2003) provided more elements, that I find relevant to conceptualize identities in relation to criticality, from three lenses: a) Ericksonian and neo-Ericksonian approach, which explain that individuals decide if they want to adapt and fit to life situations; b) a socio-cultural approach, in which it is considered that individuals are better perceived when they are observed from their outside in relation to social and cultural processes from which they are constructed; and c) a post structural view,

which contemplates the importance of the socio-political context in how identities evolve largely out of the history of how we construct our emotions, thoughts, judgments and beliefs. This author points that identity takes shape when narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture. According to Beachamp and Thomas (2009), “What may result from a teacher’s realization of his or her identity, in performance within teaching contexts, is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context” (p.183). This conceptualization of identity is relevant for this profiling because it connects elements that may be located in the embodiment of CI, such as agency and the desire for transformation in different educational scenarios.

On the other hand, we are going to consider criticality as those thoughts, proposals, positions, actions, and notions that teachers include in our practice inside and outside the classroom, and that look for criticizing the status quo (Hinchey, 2006). Menard-Warwick et al., (2019), which work is included in this profiling exercise, stated that being critical means being worried about power relations in ELT. This means that I searched for studies that explored what, when, how, where or why English language teachers resist, question, confront

or criticize elements of their practice. Kubota (2017), provided a conceptualization that directly addresses to English language teachers' CI, as an element that is shaped and reshaped by ideological differences with those who interact with us, and by elements related to the teaching practice such as discourse, literature, our formation, and political situations, among others. Then, I conceptualize Critical Identities as changing structures that English Language teachers build throughout our lives by reflecting upon our profession, and by being aware of the power relations between teaching and the social, political, cultural and economic elements of our context. These structures are influenced by the interactions with other members of the educative field and are constantly willing for transformation.

THE TRENDS

Considering the reviewed studies, I could observe three trends in the CI research: there are documents that relate to CI, by revolving around critical reflections, some analyze criticality in the teaching practice as content in courses or programs for in-service and pre-service teachers, and others show that there is a connection with how language teachers embody a CI to confront power relations in their teaching practice. The trends have been named: The role of Critical reflection in teaching practices as a framework for CI, Critical thinking: The teacher as critical thinker in Education and ELT education, and CI embodied by EFL teachers, correspondingly.

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL REFLECTIONS WITHIN NARRATIVES IN TEACHING PRACTICES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CI

Reflections, mainly expressed in narratives, are a starting point to explore teachers' identities. These have been an important instrument in the field of education because they provide us an opportunity as teachers to improve our practices by self-examining, self-evaluating, and learning from our experiences, so we may base our actions on a thoughtful exercise (Shandomo, 2010). The implementation of critical reflections in English language teachers' narratives could make the difference between those three strands of thought that Kumaravadivelu (2002) pointed: "(a) teachers as passive technicians, (b) teachers as reflective practitioners, and (c) teachers as transformative intellectuals" (p.8), being the last one the result of a reflective process. Then, the research of English language teachers' CI is attached to the exploration of the reflections over our practices because by narrating and reflecting over our stories and histories, we may understand how criticality influences our identities and

actions. According to Beachamp and Thomas (2009), "What may result from a teacher's realization of his or her identity, in performance within teaching contexts, is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context" (p.183). Some of the reviewed studies reported the implementation of reflections within the narratives of the participants, some directly look for problematizing CI and implemented the reflections as methodology, while others were taken into account in this profiling exercise because along the content of the reflections, it was possible to observe hints of a CI. I have also considered documents that reveal elements such as agency in the reflections made by the participants.

Parvin (2017) problematized how thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge, through critical reflections, influence the construction and reconstruction of the identity at different stages of our professional lives as teachers. The author implemented narratives to reflect upon the construction of her own life as student first, and then as teacher, and indicated that narrative self-study allowed her to explore her identity from her discursively shaped thoughts, her beliefs, and knowledge. Her stories and histories were the data that she analyzed along the study. Parvin chained her reflective writings to describe how she went from being a student who did not question the status quo of the system, to a teacher who contested a system that turned English classroom into an authoritarian environment. In the same way, Banegas and Gerlach (2021) implemented critical reflections to explore critical language teacher education by following a comprehensive sexuality education approach and a gender perspective in their English language teaching methodology modules, which allowed them to observe elements of their identity and agency. Thanks to their reflections, they were able to indicate that critical pedagogy facilitated the construction of their identity based on a specific social environment, which demanded them to be compromised with socially just initiatives.

Basabe (2019) carried out a study in which problematized the praxis of critical pedagogy to teach literature in English language from an analytical autoethnography of his practice. He started a reflection motivated by his uncertain of whether he was critical in his practice or not. He found that the reflections over his practice positioned him as a teacher that wants to keep a critical position in his teaching context. Here I find that, by the way the author places himself as teacher, there is an influence of criticality on his identity. Similarly, Amy (2007) problematized teachers' professional identity through a narrative inquiry. Here the author presents a

Chinese EFL teacher's reflections about its professional life and analyzes the identity construction based on a social theory of identity formation, in which there are three means to fit in: engagement, imagination, and alignment. The author uses this theory to point that alignment may affect the building of the identity because it leads to coercion and oppression (power relations), bringing about dissociation and alienation, which according to what has been discussed before, has an incidence over the embodiment of a CI. As it will be seen along this profiling, there are connections between power relations and CI.

Franzak (2002) problematized teacher identity by implementing something the author called Critical Friends Groups strategy, which consisted on study groups driven by their members, in which, throughout their experiences within the school life, teachers reflect upon their professional development. In this study, the author indicates that as teachers, we develop our identity throughout an ongoing, changing and dynamic process that takes place in time and when we interact with other teachers. For this study, the author implements the reflections made by a teacher named Rebecca, to observe how this teacher has built her identity. I evidenced here some hints of Rebecca's CI when she mentions that she "believes that teachers are too isolated in their practice and that, as a result, they have not had a voice in decisions that impact their teaching" (p.272). And she continues saying that she perceives "this isolation as a response to multiple forces, including top-down decisions implemented by administrative and government entities" (p.272). Then, it is observed that these Critical Friends Groups facilitated the evidence of how Rebecca embodies a CI. Likewise, Quintero and Guerrero (2018), problematize, based on a reflective narrative that focused on preservice teachers' stories, three models of teacher, that are aligned with Kumaravadivelu's (2002) proposal: passive technician, reflective practitioner and reflexive practitioner, and critical practitioner or transformative intellectual, to analyze pre-service English language teachers' identities construction. The authors observed a constant negotiation of "self" that exposed an epistemological, professional and personal history, that included the notion of the participants' agency.

Kubota (2016), problematized issues of identity in relation to language teachers who support critical approaches to pedagogy, starting from a personal experience that led the author to reflect critically about her own identity as language teacher. Thanks to her critical reflections, Kubota is able to observe that CI is

evidenced as an ideological struggle that appears when we have differences with the people we interact with in our life as language teachers, and these differences may be resisted or negotiated, which has repercussions over the way we shape and reshape our identity. In a research study carried out by Menard-Warwick, Ruiz Bybee, Degollado, Jin, Kehoe and Masters in 2019, entitled Same Language, Different Histories: Developing a "Critical" English Teacher Identity, the authors problematize how English language teachers build our identity in the contemporary global society by understanding our positions in history, our relationships with our students, and the way we perceive English as symbolic capital. The authors conducted three separate ethnographic case studies in which three teachers at different countries and contexts, reflected upon their histories and stories, and it was observed that the three participants in the research study have in common a position against imperialist powers.

Samaneh, Kendall, and Zia (2019) conducted a study in which they observed the reflections in the narratives of two EFL teachers in relation to identity, and found that the self-images as language teachers come from the interactions that exist with education policies, in this particular case, in Iran. The authors point that our identities are subjected to change, and that educative policies cause struggles between what we believe and what we expect, which should be taken into account when it comes to talk about teachers' professional development in contexts that are highly confronted by politics. According to what I have discussed, in this study the teachers' CI is evidenced when the participants refer to their postures about ELT community, rules, textbooks, but especially when they talk about the controversy of teaching culture with the particularities of the EFL context in Iran, and how their practice is influenced by their personal ideologies and philosophies of teaching. Suzanne and Craig (2020) explored two experiences of two different studies that inquired about teacher identity formation in Ireland and both studies implemented post structural approaches as methodology. Although this study was interested in observing the role of the approaches, both studies implemented critical reflections to observe teacher identity in relation to critical positions. The first study analyzed the regular experiences of 11 Irish male primary school teachers, while the other observed how a neoliberal tone influences teachers' identities and education in Ireland. Although this paper does not refer directly to CI, it is observed that reflections are poststructuralist tools to research about identities where elements such as agency and critical positions emerge.

Lawrence and Nagashima (2019) implemented narratives to reflect about their own histories and stories in relation to their identities and how they were shaped under particular conditions of their gender, sexuality, race, and native-speaker status. They implemented a poststructuralist intersectionality framework to discuss about their identities as teachers, and used as method a duo ethnographic approach. CI may be observed along the participants' dialogues when they refer to the way they included those conflictive elements of their identities in their teaching practice. By reading the conversations and reflections that the two participants held during the study, it is evidenced how there is a CI that looks for resisting the way these teachers were perceived throughout their practice.

The critical reflections allow us to explore and understand elements of our identities that are not consciously taken into account in our daily practices. By narrating our histories and stories and reflecting upon them, and the elements that surround them, we may find how criticality is part of who we are and what we do. In the next part, I will discuss the findings in relation to that criticality within our practices and our identities as English language teachers.

CRITICAL THINKING: THE TEACHER AS CRITICAL THINKER IN EDUCATION AND ELT EDUCATION

Criticality has been considered in the education field, in terms of the practice, as an approach to teach. It is presented to pre-service and in-service teachers as content that should be systematically learned, assimilated, integrated and implemented in our classrooms. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) points in its definition for Critical Thinking, that the 21st century skills movement invited all schools to include in their curriculums, activities and content that favor the development of critical thinking as an ability to have effective students in the university, and functional workers in today's workplaces. The 21st century skills have penetrated the schools in Colombia, and secretaries of education, principals, coordinators, and teachers in general, have perceived the development of these skills as a must in our programs and practices. One example is the orienting document developed and presented by the Secretaria de Educación de Bogotá (2020) for the 2020's Foro Educativo Distrital, in which teachers were invited to discuss and present pedagogical experiences that had taken into account these 21st century skill as framework.



In the English language teaching field (ELT), the first contact that we consciously have with critical positions, is related to a methodological approach that may facilitate the development of both, critical thinking and communicative skills, in our students. Some of the studies that I found observed the criticality as something that English language teachers should learn throughout a training process. For example, Petek and Bedir (2018) problematized how a 14-week action plan implementation, about the integration of critical thinking into language teaching, impacted 8 pre-service English teachers' awareness and teaching practices. The authors argued that thinking critically is a fundamental learning and innovation tool for post-secondary education and the workforce. They also argued that thinking critically is not natural in us and that when we do not train our thinking it is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed and downright prejudiced. That is why they consider that critical thinking requires purposeful training and instruction. The authors found after the intervention that pre-service English teachers did not have enough knowledge and skills to implement critical thinking in their classes because the education system in Turkey, where the study took place, does not motivate the development of this ability. They also observed that pre-service English teachers can insert critical thinking in their classes when they are trained to do it.

Fatemeh, Mohammad Reza, Gholamreza, and Mohammad Davoudi. (2020) problematized how EFL teachers and learners perceived the fundamental principles and constructs of critical thinking, the main characteristics of a critical thinker, and strategies for reinforcing critical thinking ability. The authors argued that developing critical thinking should be the main aim for schools and that it is important to create pedagogical proposals considering how EFL teachers and learners understand critical thinking. This study did not observe a course or a program to teach critical thinking, but it implemented semi-structured interviews with eight EFL teachers and ten learners, from three different contexts of public, private, and seminary schools in Iran to propose strategies necessary to reinforce critical thinking ability in students. To achieve these purposes, the researchers of this study used a constructivist grounded theory methodology and proposed a model of critical thinking regarding teachers' and learners' perceptions. The authors found that there are important pedagogical implications for the teachers when they favor the development of learners' critical thinking skills because the students may think more deeply, solve problems better, communicate and collaborate more effectively. The study also concluded that critical thinking offers

an opportunity for curriculum developers and syllabus designers because they can include activities that favor this ability.

Hatch and Meller (2009) stated that teachers and schools sometimes favor the existence of an unfair socioeconomic system, and that it is necessary that teachers promote the confrontation of the status quo and then, motivate others to work for social change. They also pointed that for developing a critical perspective in students, it was necessary to consider their background knowledge and then connect it with the world. That is why they explored the incidence of introducing critical pedagogical approaches in a program for pre-service teachers. They addressed activities related to critical literacy that enriched the future teachers' understanding of critical pedagogies. Here the authors were interested in implementing criticality as a methodological approach that should be learned and implemented by the pre-service teachers to favor their future students.

In another study, Abednia (2012) problematized how a critical EFL teacher education course contributed to Iranian teachers' professional identity reconstruction. The author implemented Pre-course and post-course interviews with seven teachers, and considered reflective journals, class discussions. After the implementation of the course, the author found three shifts in the participants' professional identities, who went from conformity with dominant ideologies, to critical autonomy, from an instrumentalist perception of the teaching, to a critical/transformational one, and from a linguistic perception of language education to a more educational view. In a very similar way, Sardabi et al., (2018) problematized the impact of teacher education programs informed by the tenets of critical pedagogy in prospective teachers' professional identity. The authors conducted a qualitative study that observed the role of the program as an attempt to influence the professional identity of future EFL teachers. The authors implemented reflective journals, class discussions, and semi-structured interviews before and after the program with 19 future teachers to observe the building of their identity. They found that the participants went from a student's voice to a teacher's voice, from an uncritical attitude to developing agency, and from a narrow view of ELT to a broader one. For these two studies the focus were not teachers' students but the teachers' identities in relation to elements that may be found in their criticality. The purpose of the authors was to conduct interventions that favored transformations in the participants perceptions in relation to their criticality.

Fernández (2019) presented a complete description of the philosophy and model of Xicanx Institute for Teaching & Organizing, which is a very interesting proposal that is not related to the ELT field, but that is a good example of a pedagogical experience that is interested in training and supporting critically conscious teachers. Although the field in which this study takes place is Ethnic Studies, it is interesting how criticality is across the whole proposal. The purpose of the model is to implement a pedagogy that is humanizing, critical and community-responsive. The model is motivated by the need of a model of Ethnic Studies professional development that opposes to the model of current teacher education by infusing critical identity, work decolonizing and re-humanizing. The proposal is basically “an act of resistance to the attack on Mexican American Studies in Arizona as well as in response to the need for decolonizing and re-humanizing Ethnic Studies professional development” (Fernández, 2019, p.2). I decided to include this study although it is not addressed to English language future teachers because it gives account of teachers’ CI in action. Similarly, Vavrus (2009) analyzed a curriculum based on a multicultural critical teacher education, that looked for including an alternative to teach sexuality and gender education in a meaningful way. The author implemented an autoethnographic narrative assignment with future teachers to reflect about their identities as something influenced by their experiences with gender and sexuality. The study included 38 students, and each one carried out an autoethnography that exposed their lived histories. The analysis observed elements such as gender identification, heteronormativity, patriarchy, sex education, schooling experiences, teacher complicity, and teacher identity. These elements were perceived as influential in the existence of agency. The study found that, at first, the future teachers informed a lack of preparation to talk about certain topics with their students, but after the implementation of the proposed curriculum the participants felt more self-assured about addressing topics related to sex education that are normally ignored.

Singh and Richards (2006) problematized how teaching and learning in the language teacher education dominates the technical-rational discourse, perpetuating the idea that language teaching knowledge can be learnt with content-based courses and then just having a practicum experience. This tendency makes practitioners focus on LTE issues that just relate to knowledge about pedagogy, which reinforces a training model. The authors pointed that these courses tend to ignore elements that favor changes in teachers’ classroom like including the notion that in humans learning there are elements that mediate

such as social interactions, the context and the identity. According to what I have discussed in this paper, not only the proposed course was conceived from the perspective of a teacher’s CI, but it also looks for the construction of a CI in future teachers as the intention is to promote a socially constructed identity as professionals.

Khan (2019) shared in her study the experiences derived from a course framed in a bilingual education program with future teachers at a university, which had to do with gender and sexuality in the classroom and in policy. The study examined students’ reflective journals, which highlighted the importance of including gender and sexuality in the ELT curriculum and teacher education programs. This was another proposal that promoted critical consciousness throughout the inclusion of content in the curriculum. The authors concluded that it is difficult to connect the theory to the practice in the design of the course, but, according to students’ reflections, the content included in the program had an influence over the participants’ perceptions about stereotypes, and over the building of their self-identity as future teachers. The authors pointed that teacher training academic programs should favor through the curriculum the construction of identities rooted in critical pedagogy.

After discussing what has been found in terms of criticality in the ELT field, it is important to mention that there is a gap because this issue has been explored in relation to our students and to the strategies that we should implement to favor the development of their critical thinking, but English language teachers’ criticality, as a constituting and constitutive element in our identities, does not seem to be fully explored. It is relevant to research about those teachers that in our sense of agency confront or resist certain institutionalized impositions, that is, teachers as critical thinkers. I have to point that I do not agree with the idea that the construction of CI can or should be forced throughout courses or programs. On the contrary, I am more interested on understanding how we build CI through our histories and stories.

CI EMBODIED BY EFL TEACHERS

As I mentioned before, I have conceptualized CI as changing structures that constitute us as teachers, which are built throughout our lives, and which can be located in our reflections in relation to our histories and stories, our practices, and our contexts. But these identities may also be observed in what we do as teachers inside and outside the classrooms. There is not one single critical

identity and that is why I have referred to this concept in plural as Critical Identities, because they are manifested and understood in different ways. This means that CI are defined by subjective elements that are shaped by each teacher based on our own lives and perceptions, and we embody them in different and particular ways.

Some of the studies included here are related to elements in teachers' identities such as teachers' own self-images, critical awareness development, agency, and ethical considerations, which can be triggering CI as an embodiment practice. For instance, Zare-Ee and Ghasedi (2014) problematized how teachers' professional identity (TPI) is constructed. According to the author, TPI is influenced by many factors and conditions inside and outside the classroom. Issues such as how successful the teacher thinks he is, or how successful students think he is; issues such as whether the teacher has a family or a second job, etc. Teachers' professional self-image is about how we define our professional roles, how we see ourselves as teachers. These factors affect the way our identity as professionals, is formed. The authors mention that there are societal pressures and conditions such as others' expectations that shape a teacher's identity. In this study CI is embodied by the participants when they talk about administrative issues in relation

to how they have an incidence over the building of the teachers' identities. One participant, while talking about the people in charge of the administration, said that they "control you, to see where your qualifications are weak, what may wipe out your name from the list of teachers...; they never give you a hand to lift you up to the position you deserve..." (p.1994). This is a manifestation of a critical identity that expresses a critical position regarding the way teachers are evaluated. CI may not be evident during our practices, but in conversations out of our classes, we allow ourselves to express our critical standings.

Monica (2017) carried out a study in which problematized the process of redefining the teachers' identities and their critical awareness development by exploring areas of their socialization. This study could be easily placed in any of the three trends that I have presented as self-reflections were implemented in a program for pre-service teachers, but it is included in this trend because the author pointed, as evidence of critical awareness, that the participants "explored teaching methods that are new for the students and teaching methods that are new for them" (p.18). This implies that throughout their practices, the participants found a way to embody their CI by exploring different methods that considered the



development of critical awareness. The author points that becoming a teacher involves the (trans)formation of the identity, a process of being open, negotiated and shifting, and it is not a totally personal or isolated process because it happens depending on the social and cultural context within the field of education.

Miller et al., (2017) problematized language teacher identity as the base of educational practice and observed Foucault's notion of ethical self-formation to understand the development of teacher agency and critical identity work. The author carried out a case study of an elementary reading and language arts teacher. The study considers that the most important objective of teacher education and language teacher education, should be generating change in classroom practices that can lead to improved learning outcomes. The study allowed a discussion in which the authors indicate that teachers' professional development may contribute to favor language teachers' awareness of their subjectivity in relation to the discourses related to the value of language teaching. Ibrahim et al., (2013) problematized teachers' resistance to educational changes imposed by education authorities. The authors observed four factors for educational change in government schools in the United Arab Emirates which were: psychological, personal, school-culture-related, and organizational. The data was collected by implementing a survey with 39 statements, which was answered by 255 male and female, foreign and national teachers who taught different grade levels in public schools. The outcomes of this study indicated, according to what I have presented along this document, that teachers embodied CI by resisting the changes, which became an obstacle for the government proposal. This resistance has its origins in how change was initiated and administered. It was observed that a reason for resisting change was the fact that teachers were left out from the decision-making process.

Sloan (2006) carried out a study in which explored how teachers responded to curriculum policies based

on accountability. The author implemented class observations and teacher interviews to observe their identities and how agency emerged in response to accountability explicit curriculum policies. The study concluded that teachers' reactions towards locally conceived accountability-explicit curriculum policies are different and particular. The author also found that teachers react to accountability explicit curriculum policies based on their identities, (which I perceive as an embodiment of CI). Finally, it was determined that teachers' agency is the way the participants resist accountability explicit curriculum policies.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the little research that has been done in relation to CI and the trends that I have identified, I can state that criticality, in relation to identities, has not been explored enough. Most of the research carried out in this sense refers to how teachers implement criticality as part of their teaching practice. CI do not seem to be a huge interest in the problematization of identity, and I believe that it is important to revise the issue, especially in troubled societies as the Colombian one. Colombian teachers are constantly performing critical positions inside and outside the classrooms, so, exploring English language teachers' CI may contribute to a better understanding of how we position ourselves as critical, and how this influences our decisions, perceptions and in general our practices. Criticality is something that teachers develop as we immerse in the education field, and it is relevant to understand how it influences the construction of our identities. Research in education has shown that it is important to know ourselves if we want to understand how we build our practice because our stories and histories are connected to the way we exercise our profession (Day et al., 2006). There are social conditions, policies and historical events that have influenced the development of the Education system as a conflicted field in which teachers resist, confront or negotiate, building diverse CI.

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