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Professional Agency of Costa Rican University EFL Teachers on Regional Campuses: A Life History Narrative

by

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Abstract

This study explored how the rural working contexts of Costa Rican adult educators teaching in postsecondary education interact with their condition as non-native English-speaking instructors to inform their professional agency. In this study, professional agency refers to the engagement of adult educators in making choices, influencing others, and taking stances on their work and professional identities in negotiation with their individual characteristics and social context. Data for the study come from a narrative inquiry into the complexities involved in being a university teacher in a regional campus through life history interviews, a researcher's reflexivity journal, and supplementary documentation. Nine English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university teachers constituted the participants in this study. The data from the study were analysed and organized by following the three-dimensional, temporal-relational perspective on teacher agency offered by the ecological approach. In that view, findings were organized in relation to the past, present and future. Findings suggest that elements of the past gave teachers a broad repertoire of responses to engage and act and mainly included participants' rural and institutional belonging and how non-native English-learning experiences inform their teaching practices. The present dimension of participants reported beliefs and the affective factors behind non-nativeness, classroom agency and institution structure, the role of their relationships, and a strong sense of commitment. The projective dimension of professional agency in this study were frequently rooted in a weighty sense of accountability for students' and the community's economic, social, and academic development. The need for academic professional development and empowerment through community projects stood out in participants' stories.

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Dedication

Isaiah 55:8-10 so encouragingly states “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways”. I dedicate this dissertation, first and foremost, to Him. Every step of the way in the journey to this dissertation was paved by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and I am eternally grateful and humble this degree was part of His plan for me. To my husband, Cesar, thank you for always supporting the goals I set for myself and for embarking on this adventure with me. You have spent a great part of our lives to convince me that I was capable of anything I could dream. I would not have made it to the end without your unwavering support and trust. To Mariana and Alejandro, I started my journey in formal higher education because of you. You were my inspiration to always go the extra mile. Please know you can do whatever your hearts desire, and my hope for you is that you will always keep your thirst for knowledge and never-ending learning. You, my children, are my biggest blessing and I hope you always know and feel the love I have for you. To my mom for her strong and generous support; my dad for his unconditional confidence in my capacity; and my grandfather, Papa Miguel, thank you for leaving a legacy that has surpassed time. I am blessed to have you all in my life, and this manuscript is just as much yours as it is mine.

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

> "Our views about being life history researchers rest on understandings about ourselves and others around us" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 45).

As a researcher, I acknowledge and recognise that my voice is constitutive to my narrative inquiry as a research methodology. Examining my position as a researcher is an integral part of my study. As Cole and Knowles (2001) pointed out, doing life history research is an extension of who we are as individuals. Hence, in following a narrative paradigm, I used a personal voice that acknowledges the view that my role as a researcher rests on understandings about myself and others around me. I begin by recognizing that my commitment as a researcher is informed by my personal and professional experiences. At the same time, these experiences inform my actions about "the focus, direction, tone and emphasis of our [my] work" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 45). In this view, by doing this life history research, I reveal elements of myself, my values, perspectives and contextual characteristics that have shaped who I am as well as my passions, commitments and motivations that have driven me to conduct this research.

Keeping in mind the risks inherent in making my researcher's voice too dominant, it is my intention to acknowledge the role of reflexivity at every step of the research process. It is through this conscious process of being aware of personal and methodological concerns that I hope to honour my participants and myself. As the researcher in this study, I feel I need to be cognizant of my contributions to the construction of meanings by acknowledging that it is impossible to remain "outside of" my study topic while conducting research.

Introducing Myself

"What am I doing here?" I can still feel the paralyzing echo of this question streaming through my consciousness from when, for the first time in my life, I, a native Spanish speaker,

was in front of a class giving an oral presentation in English. I was an undergraduate English language student who, beyond her expectations, had ventured to pursue an English Teaching Major on a rural regional campus of a public university. I was not ready for public speaking, and I was certainly not prepared to do it in another language. Even though quitting was the easier option, I decided to continue. This event was just the beginning of a series of emotionally loaded moments that kept me reflecting on my actions.

Years later, in my role as a language instructor, I was in a conference room, standing in front of a crowd of experts in my field, when the daunting question “What am I doing here?” resurfaced. I doubted not only my linguistic abilities but also my sanity, as I wondered why I had chosen to expose myself to such scrutiny. Nevertheless, through many more conferences and many more challenges, I continued to push myself. In 2016, the week I was finalizing my arrangements to leave my home country, Costa Rica, and head to Canada to start my PhD program, the horrifying echo was there again. I questioned my decision to take my family with me to another country for four years, leaving behind all that we knew, in my pursuit of a PhD. It was an upsetting fear that made me doubt my decisions once again.

Once in Canada and in my new role as an international student, my first class was nothing but threatening. That day on my way home, I burst into tears and couldn't stop asking “What am I doing here?” I felt this challenge was too much for me, but once again I did not give up. I got the highest score in that class, and it created room for the emergence of some of my research beliefs and values. Along the way, I came to realize that with each of these deeply self-reflective experiences the challenge I faced felt bigger, more difficult, than the one before. Since then, when I ask the question “What am I doing here?,” I am able to reflect on the reasons that drove me to face those intimidating challenges. I have never regretted any of my decisions because,

after the event was over, I learned that I had achieved more agency and become even more engaged. Indeed, I could not find an answer to my question anywhere but in my desire and determination to grow into a better professional.

My learning choices have been full of "light bulb moments," when I realized how much I still had to learn. Learning turned into a never-ending, lifelong process. I reflected on my passion to learn and looked into the possibilities and limitations around me. I learned to juggle all the pieces of my environment to get the best out of every opportunity. In my journey as a doctoral student in adult learning, I have found the opportunity to research professional agency in depth.

Research Problem and Purpose

Motivated by the many questions I had not yet been able to answer regarding similar autonomy and agency experiences as the ones I have lived, I decided to focus my study on understanding the professional agency experiences of adult educators in situations similar to mine. As such, based on the life histories of study participants, I explored what it means to be a non-native English-speaking instructor in rural Costa Rican postsecondary institutions and how this context has shaped the participants' professional agency.

I understand professional agency as the engagement of adult educators in making choices, influencing others, and taking stances on their work and professional identities in negotiation with their individual characteristics and social patterning. This engagement emerges and transforms through time as a result of the individuals' beliefs and capacities, as well as multi-level relations with their structural environments (Bandura, 2006; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013).

In this study, adult educators are defined both by their role as formal instructors (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014) of postsecondary students of any age (Brookfield, 2015) and by having passed

the stabilization stage in their career cycle (Huberman, 1989). This stage is characterized by a firm commitment to the career of teaching. I am interested in researching the stories and experiences of adult educators who decided to become English instructors even when their first language was not English. In particular, I looked at a group of adult educators whose life histories have been shaped by the two distinctive circumstances of geographical location and the native speaker fallacy (Holliday, 2005; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Phillipson, 1992; Selvi, 2016).

Geographical location is related to spatial segregation, which includes issues of urban and rural disparities, discrepancies between the growth of communities and resource accessibility (Kanbur & Venables, 2005). Second, in terms of the native speaker fallacy, this construct claims that the ideal English language teacher is a native English-speaking teacher (NEST) (Holliday, 2005; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Phillipson, 1992; Selvi, 2016); hence, non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) are regarded as less able. In my study, I was intrigued by the stories behind why and how my NNEST participants took on the responsibility of teaching a language that is not their first, in a region that is recognized to be the poorest in the country (INEC, 2014).

In order to understand the impetus for this study, I find it important to provide an overview of the setting where the study took place. This contextualization illuminates how the need for my research came about.

Building a Context for the Study

Costa Rica is a small, stable democratic country in Central America. From either a comparative political or a political and economic trajectory perspective, Costa Rica is exceptionally positioned. Indeed, in 2002 the World Bank (WB) ranked the country in the 77th percentile, which was some 22 percentage points higher than its neighbouring countries

(Lehoucq, 2006). Added to the WB statistics, the United Nations Development Program in its Human Development Index has measured and ranked Costa Rica's economic development and social spending and concluded that the country's rates of well-being and literacy have increased while those of poverty, infant mortality, family income inequality, and mortality have significantly decreased (Programa del Estado de la Nación, 2003).

Costa Rica's bold demilitarization decision, which dates back to 1948, and further allocation of its budget to education is clear evidence that education has been a priority in the country. Basic education has been free and compulsory since the declaration of the Constitution in 1949. Drawing on Central American Bank of Economic Integration's (CABEI) recent statistics, Costa Rica boasts a literacy rate of 96.8 percent, making it the only Central American country without a high rate of illiteracy (Garza, 2016). At present, Costa Rica is known for having a stable democracy and a highly educated workforce (González, 2017).

Critically important in this study is an understanding of rurality in higher education. Rurality is still seen as a population density or distance variable where educators' agency is restricted to an act of autonomous individuals. The agency of rural educators is perceived as an act of self-reliance and choice, while rural systems, societies, economies, and cultures have not received careful attention in the research literature. Rural educators' exercise of agency is influenced by a frame that marginalizes and shapes it by ignoring questions of recognition, space and place, democratic participation, and hegemony (Corbett, 2017; Cuervo, 2016). There is an imminent need to explore the topic of recognitional and associational aspects in rural adult educators' professional agency. This may be accomplished by providing an understanding from those who teach in these conditions. There is still a need in the field to address the stories of how domination, disrespect, marginalization, and involvement in decisions have contributed to the

exercise of professional agency of NNESTs working in regional university campuses.

Higher Education in Costa Rica

Institutions of higher education in Costa Rica should be understood in the context in which they operate. These institutions fall into two categories: state and private universities. There are currently five state institutions, each with a corresponding rural regional campus. A regional campus is a decentralized academic and administrative campus that drives, coordinates and executes action in a specific region that is physically at a distance from the main university area. This campus is smaller than the main campus. Campus activity is regulated and approved by the main campus (Universidad Nacional, 2015). Applicants to state universities are required to pass an entrance exam, and some faculties have additional special requirements, such as evidence that applicants have skills in fine arts or sports. Tuition fees are low for those students who do not get a scholarship or award. In addition to state institutions, from 1976 to now, 187 private universities have been created (Consejo Nacional de Rectores, 2008; Ruiz, 2001). This increase in the number of private universities was a result of a demographic and economic boom and an extreme political polarization that took place not only in Costa Rica but also in Latin America. Enrolment rates increased as a result of some sectors' interest in becoming educated to better contribute to the country's and region's development. Formal education seemed to be necessary to end the backwardness and ignorance that impeded economic growth and to educate the conscience of the people, to become aware, so that together they could undergo the structural transformations that would allow social and economic development (Donoso-Romo, 2014). Private universities have high fees, limited funding opportunities, and no admission requirements other than a high school diploma. Their programs are shorter than the ones at public institutions.

Both private and public universities are located in rural and urban regions across the country with satellite branches located in small towns.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has determined that Costa Rica lacks a leading public authority with direct responsibility for the higher education sector. It also noted that, even though there are agencies like the National Council of Deans (Consejo Nacional de Rectores, CONARE) and the National Council of Higher Education (CONESUP), they both have their own agendas (OECD, 2017). This organization also considered that, at present, there is a need to develop and implement a long-term strategy to improve higher education. English teaching and learning is part this strategy, since the economic influence of this language requires the country to reinforce initiatives that promote bilingualism to all citizens (Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila & Knight, 2005).

The Role of the Teaching and Learning of English in Costa Rica

The teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Costa Rica dates back to before its declaration as an independent republic. In 1825, the first foreign languages department, where English, Latin, and French were taught, was founded (Córdoba, Coto & Ramírez, 2005). By 1935, as a result of an analysis of the state of education, key changes were made to the teaching and learning of English. In the mid-1900s, there were many initiatives to provide the country with citizens who could speak English. In 1957, for instance, the University of Costa Rica offered the first undergraduate program, an English Teaching Major, which was coordinated by the Faculty of Education.

English learning and teaching initiatives have gone hand in hand with economic changes (Marín, 2012). During the 1960s, the country experienced a distinctive economic shift, and a vast amount of foreign capital came from the United States. Costa Ricans witnessed the impact of

globalization and the emergence of international investment in the country. This made English learning an immediate need. In 1973, the Universidad Nacional offered the English Teaching Major with a focus on the "training and preparation of professionals in the areas of linguistics, literature, second language teaching, and translation in Costa Rica" (Cháves, Solano & Villalobos, 2010). And in 1995, English learning in primary schools became mandatory.

In their report for the World Bank, Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight (2005) recognized the high demand for qualified English language professionals from a more regional lens. They envisioned that the lack of proficiency in foreign languages among students, faculty, and staff may have negative consequences for Latin Americans and cautioned that the international competencies of students and scholars and their ability to take advantage of opportunities for international cooperation may be jeopardized; consequently "the teaching of English as a second language is key. Many programs have been launched in recent years to improve the level of English" (p. 348). As such, Costa Rica has witnessed many initiatives in the public and private sectors of higher education to offer and engage university faculty in different academic events such as conferences and workshops. Also, the program Fortalecimiento el Inglés CONARE-UNED is an initiative that offers English courses to faculty and staff at Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED).

Studies of rural education indicate an overemphasis on neoliberal governance and policy practices that place education under the microscope of audit culture. By relying on measuring strategies that focus on the outcomes and products, this audit culture compares rural educational institutions with other institutions across the country, including those in urban settings. As a result, educators in rural areas organize their work to satisfy these metrocentric demands, and educational processes in rural places are forced to comply with and perform against standard

criteria. Additionally, the redistribution of resources adds to this quantitative model a distortive view of social justice. Yet, redistribution has not created a more just educational landscape (Corbett, 2017; Cuervo, 2016).

As a result, I explored, based upon the life histories of study participants, what it means to be a NNEST in rural regional Costa Rican postsecondary institutions and how these conditions have shaped their professional agency. But, as well as exploring these particular life histories, this study examined how these conditions suggest directions for the evolution of the institutional policy and theoretical understandings discussed in this research.

At the completion of this study, it is my goal that this research offers a closer look into the multi-level factors that influence adult educators' professional agency on regional campuses. Determining the challenges and support that influence the choices they make and the stances they take holds significant value in promoting adult educators' active agency and institutional improvement. Highly engaged professionals are usually committed to students, the institution, and the community. They help ensure initiatives in the classroom, help improve student outcomes, are more able to engage with institutional complexities and uniqueness and even take part in reforms and policy design (Priestly, Biesta and Robinson, 2015).

Research Questions

The research questions formulated as a foundation for this qualitative study include the following primary question: How do the rural working contexts of adult educators teaching in postsecondary education interact with their condition as NNESTs to inform their professional agency? This question is supported by the following sub-questions:

1. How do adult educators' perceptions of their life experiences as non-native English speakers impact their existing and potential professional agency?

2. How does the rural context of their professional lives inform their existing and potential professional agency?

3. How might the voices of these adult educators suggest directions for the evolution of institutional policy and practice regarding professional agency in rural higher education in Costa Rica?

4. How might these adult educators' experiences within this particular context suggest directions for the evolution of the theoretical understanding of professional agency of NNESTs in rural higher education in Costa Rica?

Conceptual Framework: Life-course Notions in the Construction of Adult Educators' Professional Agency, Lives, and Careers

Different from focusing only on the professional agency of teachers and the responsibility it places on teachers' shoulders, the life-course lens acknowledges the many events teachers cope with in their lives either outside or inside their working life. It avoids looking at agency as planned competence; instead it recognizes the changing conditions in the workplace, and how people need to create meaningful careers in spite of transitions in their personal and professional lives. I approach the professional agency of adult educators as an autonomy that is achieved and exercised through an active engagement with their surroundings. This context includes the configurations of routine, purpose, and judgment (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Once these elements are tied together with life-course agency, we can achieve a broad understanding of how adult educators plan their lives and make favourable decisions in the long term in relation to their transitions between education, work, and other life spheres (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013). Conceptualizing agency as a process in which past habits and routines are contextualized and future possibilities envisaged in the contingencies of the present moment

(Evans, 2007) provides a richer view of the topic.

Adult educators' professional agency as a life-course construction of their lives and careers highlights the idea that agency can be achieved and exercised. In this sense, it is possible to understand how educators can exercise active agency in certain areas of their lives and specific moments in their careers, while in other moments they may show low agency. Seeing agency as achievement rather than a power or innate capacity (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) helps to recognize that professional agency depends on economic, cultural, and social resources. Agency as an innate capacity is reduced to an attribute people possess. On the contrary, agency as achievement recognizes "the interplay of personal capacities and the resources, affordances and constraints of the environment by means where the individual acts" (Priestly, Biesta and Robinson, 2015, p. 19). More specifically, this approach takes the stance that the achievement of agency results from the interaction of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual factors as they merge in particular, unique situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This approach to agency relates to the sociocultural approach that recognizes the importance of adult educators and the role of individual agency without rejecting the role of social and cultural context.

Since agency is one of the core principles for understanding the intersection of individuals and their life pathways, a focus on adult educator's career trajectories illuminates this research. In this study, adult educators' career trajectories are shaped by a multitude of factors ranging from their previous learning experiences as language learners themselves to their teaching experiences in a public university. This idea of life and career trajectories can be seen as the process of becoming, one that incorporates formation and transformation experiences. Taking up the idea of transformation, Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2008) explains that behind adults' learning process, there is the construction of new and revised interpretations

of the meaning of experiences. These transformations are not time or place limited; on the contrary, they recognize that adult learners and educators are "embedded in a complexity of relationships with ourselves, with each other, with a particular sociocultural context, and with the planet" (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014, p. 159).

Expanding the idea of trajectories, educators' lives and careers are bonded together with the notion of lifelong learning, since in their roles they are navigating teaching and learning journeys that are interconnected with those whom they work, learn, and live with along the way (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). MacKeracher (2004) highlighted a close relationship between lifelong learning, teachers' trajectories, and professional agency by explaining how adult learners and educators make sense of experiences and use them in solving problems, making decisions, and acting in ways that are congruent with their surroundings. Lifelong learning places experiences as a primary source of learning throughout a lifetime. It also recognizes that its flexibility, accessibility, and availability traits are aligned with the transitional needs regarding time and place of the experiences lived (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Accordingly, this assertion aims toward the idea that change in relation to our location and timing in our life course makes careers a dynamic process.

Orientation and Significance

The intent of this study has been three-fold. First, it contributes to opening a space where adult educators in regional campuses in Costa Rica have a voice to share and reveal elements of their professional agency life histories. Through this research, adult educators' personhood and subjectivity are recognized in an attempt to widen the understanding of their agency at work. By sharing their experiences through meaningful conversations, these adult educators are able to challenge their own narratives and implicit assumptions that have shaped their practices. Indeed,

life history research allowed these study participants to exhibit their unique and contextualized experiences in a way that they could make the familiar strange, where their local experiences explained a larger reality that otherwise would be kept invisible (Cole & Knowles, 2001). As a result, these narratives might offer insight into educators' boundaries in life, so that they can work toward increasing their agency.

Second, this research provides insight into adult educators so that their local experiences illuminate the broader meaning of their professional agency for both the present and future social standing of their profession in Costa Rica. By clarifying how professional agency is influenced by their linguistic development and by geographic location, these narratives may provide an analysis that weaves together language and rural stories that have shaped their exercise of professional agency. It is through detailed interrogations of individual experiences regarding how teachers approach reform, face challenges, and undergo changes that insights and knowledge about their realities might be gained (Dhunpath, 2010).

Finally, I believe the results of this study benefit both the fields of foreign-language teaching and learning and adult learning, since the findings may have the potential to better inform developers of university policy on regional campuses about adult educators' barriers in achieving active agency. By listening to the voices of individual educators and identifying sociocultural and discursive manifestations that may influence professional agency, those in leadership positions may take action toward life-course notions of agency in language instruction in higher education. It is impossible to deny the influences of institutional and local contexts on the shaping of educators' practices. On this account, Dhunpath (2010) elaborated on Huberman's (1989) idea by warning that "the institutional context, which manifests itself through the education system, its organizational and bureaucratic structures, roles and relationships also

significantly influences an educator's practice and career phases" (p. 546). Hence, a clear understanding of barriers for professional agency can direct those in formal leadership in various faculties to make changes that positively influence conditions such as material circumstances, physical artifacts, power relations, work cultures, discourses, and subject positions (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013).

The Researcher's Personal Connection and Motivation

I decided to pursue my degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Universidad Nacional, Brunca extension in 1996. Being that Costa Rica is a Spanish-speaking country, this decision placed me in an unprivileged position since the English-language teaching industry often supports the assumption that NESTs are the gold standard, while NNESTs are inferior educators because they lack an innate linguistic skill (Walkinshaw & Hoang Oanh, 2014; Wang, 2012). The implicit and explicit attitudes toward my circumstance made me aware of my situation, and I was consumed by an endless passion for continual learning. That was how I started attending teaching conferences, reading specialized journals, and sharing successes and failures with colleagues. As part of my passion, I also decided not to allow geographical barriers to interfere with my professional practice.

Years later, I became a language instructor in the same university, and I started to see clearly how social structures and individual actions were influenced by local and global agendas. A clear example was the case of how the main campus held economic privileges and how, as a consequence, it exercised the power to distribute resources to regional campuses. I came to realize that power is about negotiation, that this negotiation is sometimes unequal, and that we exercise and respond to power according to our understanding of ourselves in our social context (Jarvis, 2007).

Added to the notion of unprivileged NNESTs, I was assuming the role of adult educator when leading classes for in-service and pre-service EFL instructors. In this journey, 16 years of teaching experience in the poorest region in my country has been a never-ending lesson, where every day brings the opportunity to help people who struggle in their pursuit of education. Perhaps 90% of my students have at least one type of scholarship or funding due to their vulnerable social and economic situations. Universidad Nacional's motto "Universidad Nacional, the necessary university" permeates my understanding of the responsibility I have to remember that in my practice the human emotional and affective dimensions are equally important as the intellectual processes.

However, this awareness comes easy for me, as it is impossible for me not to identify with my brave students and this motto when I recall that I was once a single mom struggling as a student to get a professional degree in this same institution. Without the support of this prestigious university and my determination, I would not have been able to overcome obstacles to now have a promising future. I know I am not an isolated case of success and I refuse to call myself unprivileged. Through the lens of my interpretation of my own reality, I recognize that my learning and teaching history is a successful one.

My main motivation to conduct this research is to address the many questions I have not been able to answer clearly. I strongly believe that answering them may give novice and expert educators a clearer exploration of their careers, their contexts, and their choices and actions. My research interest takes the form of questions I want to answer. These include: Why do some language instructors on my campus grow while others get stuck and show little interest in developing themselves? What are the factors, in either case, that influence their journeys and pathways? How do they perceive their own careers? How has context and history repressed or

catalyzed their learning? My commitment to answering these questions is rooted in my notion that when educators reflect on their individual and contextual opportunities, they have a better view of the positive impact of meaningful engagement and commitment to lifelong learning. Eventually, not only they but also the local and regional community may be subject to positive change.

Researcher Assumptions

Based on my prior experience in language teaching in a public regional university campus, I primarily view adult learning and adult education as close but different notions. In the one hand, *adult learning* comprises formal, informal, nonformal, and incidental learning that takes place parallel to the trajectories of adult educators. This learning occurs in daily events, when observing and interacting with others in the street, church, café, or any other place, and in association with other individuals when engaged in activities. It also includes paying attention, validating emotions, and dealing with the unexpected. On the other hand, *adult education* comprises the organized educational processes that are constituted by intentionally designed activities in an organization. These formal activities aim at attaining educational objectives concerned with the education of adults (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014).

Taylor's (2008) position that there are no enduring truths, that, on the contrary, change is continuous, drives adult educators to not be assured of what they know or believe. This assumption makes it imperative for adults to develop a critical worldview and seek ways to better understand their world. This is how transformative learning theory, as discussed by Mezirow (1997), presents adult learning as the process of using a prior interpretation to understand a new or revised meaning of one's experience in order to direct the way for future action. In more detail, this transformation is formed by a frame of reference (structures of

assumptions and expectations that frame individuals' points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions) and it is the revision of this frame, accompanied by reflection on experience, that is addressed as transformation. The recognition of the role of transformative learning provided me with a basis to challenge and consider my own assumptions that adult education and life history research, especially within my particular teaching context, should be transformative and reflective.

Although my focus in adult learning has been more specifically on EFL teaching contexts, I hope that the results from this research can be applied to many areas of adult teaching and learning. The participants in my research are non-native English-speaking adult educators whose careers are developed on a regional campus. However, I hope their voices can also inform all language teachers in general and adult educators who work on a regional campus regardless of their specialization. My assumption is that the stories narrated in this research honour adult educators' careers and lives; they, in accordance with the advocacy group on education policy of the Council of Popular Education of Latin America and the Caribbean's (CEEAL) report (2017), need more support from universities, teaching associations, and civil society organizations in Latin America.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this dissertation introduced the study and its importance by focusing on how my research study aims to investigate how adult educators experience geographic and linguistic barriers when achieving active agency. This chapter provided a background on my personal connection and motivation for my research, which is situated in the field of adult education in rural Costa Rica. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature about understanding EFL teaching and professional agency in regional campuses. The methodology of the study is

discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Within that chapter, I include a description of my epistemological, ontological, and methodological standing and explain the research design and data sources and data analysis procedures. It also presents information on ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 introduces the setting through narrative portraits of each community and institution where participants worked. In this chapter, I also include portraits of each of the nine participants. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, detailing the themes that describe the personal journeys of the participants in their exercise of professional agency. In Chapter 6, I present a discussion of the different findings from the research study in conversation with the literature. Finally, Chapter 7 includes my conclusions, implications for practice and further research and the limitations of the study. The last pages of this document include a complete list of references and the appendices.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

"We never know when we might come across a piece of writing that, either in form or substance, might provide the intellectual or creative spark necessary to move research ideas forward" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 64).

Though there has been much in the literature on agency that centres on how it is understood in the social sciences (Archer, 2003; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1984), on individual intentional agency (Giddens, 1984) and on workplace learning (Eteläpelto, 2008; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013), very little has been written about how the rural working contexts of adult educators teaching in postsecondary education interact with their condition as non-native English-speaking instructors to inform their professional agency. This gap in understanding how geographical and linguistic barriers influence professional agency is a concern because adult educators who are often employed on regional campuses may deal with invisible factors that come from structural and environment-related forces.

This chapter examines the important literature in the areas relevant to understanding adult learning theories, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, and professional agency in the context of both adult learning and regional campuses. First, I offer a general overview of adult learning theories. Second, I present research regarding the dichotomy between native English-speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST), followed by an overview of the research on the native speaker fallacy, native-speakerism, and World English and Global Englishes. World Englishes and Global Englishes represent an intent to include linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural diversity and fluidity of English users in a globalised world (Rose & Galloway, 2019) that have been excluded in native speakerism ideas. In this section I also review studies on language, culture, and power as well as studies of the effects of

these on language learners' and educators' identities. Finally, I include studies on professional agency and its life-course approach. In the final lines of this chapter, I discuss certain elements (e.g., institutional ethos, purpose of schooling, tradition, public voice) in the context of professional agency in rural higher education.

A Look into Adult Learning

While adult education values formal learning within educational institutions as part of organized learning processes, adult learning acknowledges a broader range of learning experiences. Indeed, adult education comprises intentionally designed activities in educational institutions where attaining specific objectives concerned with the education of adults is a crucial characteristic (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Different from adult education, adult learning includes formal, informal, non-formal, and incidental learning processes. These processes acknowledge daily events that involve observing, interacting, and engaging with other individuals in a variety of social activities.

When taking a first look at adult learning, four main traditional theories stand out: andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning. Andragogy, developed in the 1960s, is recognized as the first framework for adult learning. In attempting to understand how and why adults learn, this framework outlines six main assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners: their need to know, the learners' self-concept, the role of the learners' experiences, their readiness to learn, their orientation to learning, and their motivation. Self-directed learning focuses on understanding how adults learn on their own by setting plans to attain goals, how they get resources, and how they evaluate their progress. At the heart of all of theories about how adults learn is the notion of experience and experiential learning. In this regard, John Dewey's contribution on the link between life experiences and learning brought to

light the significant value of what adults bring with them from earlier experiences in life (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Finally, transformative learning, another influential theory of adult learning, is grounded in Mezirow's (1996) belief that learning is "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience to guide future action" (p. 162).

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) provided a further understanding of adult learning by discussing how some theories of adult learning focus on adult characteristics (Knowles, 1980) such as an adult's self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, problem-centred focus, and internal motivation, while some others highlight adults' life situation, internal load, external load, and power factors (McClusky, 1970). They also stated that there are contributions to understanding adult learning that centre on changes in adults' consciousness (Freire, 2002; Mezirow, 2000). Newer approaches to adult learning broaden our understanding of learning processes by exploring connections to embodiment, spirituality, narrative, critical theory, postmodernism, feminist perspectives, and non-western traditions of knowing (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

In spite of the different foci of these adult learning theories or approaches, they all recognize the complexities of adults' particularities and social contexts. With this complexity in mind, understanding adult learning is not restricted to the theories above. In fact, there are parallel themes that provide a broader view of the processes behind learning adulthood. One of those themes is lifelong learning, and it is of particular interest to this study as it recognizes adult educators as learners themselves.

Lifelong learning. Humans learn as a consequence of their existence. As long as people live, they will continuously be exposed to new information that challenges their view of life.

Educators are not exempted from this. Indeed, they bear the weight of ongoing learning on their shoulders. With this in mind, pursuing an ultimate definition for lifelong learning (LL) is a complex endeavour. In an attempt to find an overarching definition, Jarvis (2015) defined it as:

> the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person—body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)—experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (more experienced) person. (pp. 83-84)

In this sense, through their continuing experiences in their world, people—educators in this case—depend on their capacity to respond to changes to transform themselves. This demanding transformation implies learning. Here is where learning cannot be limited to a specific stage in life; on the contrary, it is through their commitment to engaging as educators of adults and contributing in the field of adult education that they strengthen their commitment to lifelong learning as well.

The scholarly discourse around LL has become polarized, with one group arguing that LL is a mere educational provision, while another proposes that LL is a socio-personal fact (Billet, 2010). But both assume that interactions in educational institutions constitute the primary and most prestigious source of learning, delivering an educational discourse focusing on such institutional facts as the practices, priorities, and norms of educational institutions and emphasizing qualifications, courses, and participation. In this scenario, there are global and local agendas that have shaped the road to lifelong learning since it is essential for achieving specific economic and social goals (Billet, 2006). Here, individuals may be viewed as recipients of

courses and training sessions. For example, at the global level, organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund pressure countries they support and place conditions on them in their understanding of global economics. This phenomenon promotes an emphasis on technical-skills training (Jarvis, 2008). At the local level, educational institutions need to market courses to recruit fee-paying students. Also, social inclusion is about conforming to the dictates of government and the forces of globalisation; hence, lifelong learning can turn into a commodity (Jarvis, 2007).

Learning outcomes are influenced by interpersonal relationships in already established social systems. However, individuals should search within themselves to learn to exercise their personal motivations in a system and transcend it without destroying this system. On this note, individuals can interact in two ways: by being mere recipients or by being initiators of experiences in their world. It is this last point that informs the distinction between learning as a socio-personal process (initiators) and an educational provision (recipients) (Billet, 2006). As Gouthro (2017) emphasized, in our role as human beings, it is our deep-seated need to understand ourselves and the world that motivates us to always learn. She stated, “We are not just passive recipients of learning, but rather sentient beings engaged in an important and essential human endeavour” (p.55).

Learning as a socio-personal process or personal fact conceptualizes learning as a continuous process in which humans engage. Skills, interests, situations, resources, and the mind direct this process. It not only depends on personal decisions but also on other factors such as personality and resources. One particular reason adults learn is to prepare for the emerging roles they adopt in life. Other reasons behind this pursuit can be to communicate with others, to engage with social partners, and to develop the skills to participate in socially valued activities. There is a

strong argument that supports the idea that humans are active meaning makers who shape the direction and intensity of the learning processes (Billet, 2006). From this perspective, lifelong learning happens everywhere over a lifetime. In this view, adult educators are not the exception, and they are encouraged to reflect on their own learning processes actively.

Being an adult educator. The term "adult educator" broadly refers to someone who facilitates the learning of adults. More specifically, the concept of "adult" may be unclear as it does not have any neat age or mission boundaries (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Some common ground may be found in the idea that facilitating the learning of adults implies a commitment to acknowledging that the more educators know about how adults learn, the better they can provide learning activities that resonate with those learners (Merriam, 2008).

Brookfield (2015) centred his attention on skillful practices when teaching adults by establishing that, no matter the age, young adults or adults in higher education should be treated the same. In this scenario, an adult educator is understood to be a formal instructor (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014) who facilitates the learning of students of any age in postsecondary education (Brookfield, 2015).

Huberman (1989) provided a descriptive, non-normative model to identify themes in teachers' career cycles. He proposed five phases in this cycle, starting with survival/discovery, followed by stabilisation, experimentation/self-doubt, serenity/relational distance, and finishing with disengagement. Adult educators are not the exception to this model; in fact, these phases do not discriminate among educators' fields of study and thus can be applied to language instructors who teach English as a foreign language. Either in universities, community projects, continuing education programs, adult learning centres, or private language institutes, language instructors of adults should reflect on who they are as educators, how they recognize their particular

sociocultural context, and how they engage in critical reflection about their practice (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014).

The Native English-Speaking Teacher - Non-Native English-Speaking Teacher Dichotomy

Context determines the distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). While the former refers to teaching English in countries where English is the official or dominant language, the latter refers to monolingual classrooms in countries where the official language is something other than English (Bhaskaran, 1997; Brown & Lee, 2015; Krieger, 2005). A similar contextual and linguistic differentiation is used to categorize language teachers. On one side, NESTs are those who are native speakers of the language while NNESTs are those who decided to become English language instructors and speak another language as their mother tongue. This differentiation has resulted in a complex and controversial topic from which the NEST/NNEST dichotomy emerged.

An unprivileged positioning is reinforced by the belief in many that NESTs are considered ideal teachers because of their superiority and impregnable infallibility in their innate use of the English language. In contrast, NNESTs are viewed as defective communicators who consequently are not the best model for their students since they have poorer oral skills and inadequate knowledge of "Western" cultures (Selvi, 2016; Walkinshaw & Hoang Oanh, 2014). This sense of defectiveness has been encouraged by early influential literature in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) that has favoured the "native speaker model" in applied linguistics (Selinker, 1972; 1992) and perpetuated by discriminatory hiring policies in the profession (Ali, 2009; Clark & Paran, 2007; Kamhi-Stein, 2016; Rivers, 2016; Selvi, 2010, 2016). Due to this differentiation, advocates of NNESTs have taken a stance that indicates that all language teachers, NESTs and NNESTs, have strengths and challenges (Medgyes, 2001).

Focusing on NNESTs' strengths, Mahboob (2010) observed that teachers have a multilingual, multinational, and multicultural lens. This interpretation captures the situation of those NNESTs who work in a different country other than their homeland. Another strength is the notion that NNESTs are a living example of learners who have become successful second language users. They have shared experiences with their students and have acquired another language. Indeed, they have firsthand knowledge of students' learning difficulties as they were and are recognized as language learners themselves (Cook, 2005).

A look into NESTs' strengths reveals that their good English proficiency is their primary advantage. They are found to be superior in their spontaneous use of the language and in their ability to handle the most diverse communication situations. NESTs tend to adopt a more flexible approach, and they are more innovative and more casual. When addressing their attitude toward teaching the language, NESTs seem to prefer free activities, favour group and pair work, tolerate errors, teach items in context, use none or less of the students' mother tongue, and resort to no or less translation (Medgyes, 2001).

The weaknesses of NNESTs are typically identified as their use of the language and affective factors may influence their teaching practices. They are said to use the language for teaching purposes only, which leads to the idea that they possess a bookish, nonauthentic performance. Also, some research has found that teachers' accents affect students' perception of their comprehensibility; when a teacher is perceived to have a strong accent, he or she is also perceived as difficult to understand (Kamhi-Stein, 2014). These linguistic limitations can negatively affect self-perception and confidence. Portraying themselves as non-native or defective speakers may cause NNESTs to use the language with less confidence (Medgyes, 2001), and consequently their class instructions and interactions may be influenced by high

levels of anxiety (Canagarajah, 1999). The idea that a teacher's confidence is most dependent on their degree of language competence (Kamhi-Stein, 2014) may lead one to conclude that effective teaching instruction is dependent on teachers' confidence and language competence.

The weaknesses of NESTs arise from how the differences of culture/context and learning experiences may directly impact the classroom. First, NESTs have a different linguistic and cultural background from their learners. It is difficult for students to mirror the learning experiences of their teachers as NESTs may lack the ability to see through their students' eyes via their own language and cultural processes. Related to culture is the issue of context. Frequently NESTs are unfamiliar with learners' regional and local learning contexts. Finally, since NESTs have never learned the language but acquired it, they may lack awareness of students' experiences in their learning process. It may be difficult for NESTs in this case to sympathize with a process and dilemmas they have never faced themselves.

Efforts to understand that being a good language instructor should not be measured on nativeness, but on personal traits, qualifications, and experience have led to the creation of advocacy movements that empower NNESTs as competent professionals. The 1990s witnessed an awakening on the part of NESTs and NNESTs, with Medgyes as the pioneer, who analyzed the unfair positioning and status of NNESTs. Currently, research on NNEST issues addresses the perceptions of students, teaching methodology, training opportunities and approaches, and hiring and discrimination (Mahboob & Golden, 2013). As Llurda (2005) noted more than a decade ago, the work of Cook, Modiano, Derwing, and Munroy is indicative of the growth of interest in NNESTs. This attention has not ceased; on the contrary, it has expanded to the discourses of enquiry, criticism, and evaluation of the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs. This has led to the rise of the NNEST movement and World Englishes, which have provided support against

exclusive environments caused by the native speaker fallacy and native-speakerism.

The native speaker fallacy and native-speakerism. The dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs described in the previous section is tightly linked to Phillipson's (1992) and Holliday's (2005) "native speaker fallacy," a concept that positions the ideal teacher of English as a native speaker (Selvi, 2016). This dichotomy is also manifested in the notion of "native-speakerism," which explains that NESTs exemplify a "Western culture" that represents the ideal models of both the language and the language teaching methodology. This differentiation directly affects EFL professionals. As Selvi (2016) explained,

> it poses a two-fold threat to ELT professionals: first, it invalidates the educational and professional investment of many Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) by limiting their professional qualities and qualifications to the 'NS' construct Second, it vitiates the professional psyche of many Non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) by perpetuating a lack of self-confidence and low professional self-esteem (p. 52).

Following these ideas, there is the premise that since NESTs and NNESTs use English differently, they teach English differently, which labels them as two different species (Medgyes, 1992; 1994). More specifically, NNESTs are believed to be culturally inferior and in need of training in the "correct" Western learning and teaching methodologies (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016). These stereotypes have been responsible for the assumption that the quality of English language education in expanding-circle countries, like the ones in Latin America, would only increase if more NESTs were employed (González & Llurda, 2016).

Selvi (2016) has identified the macro and the micro levels at which this controversy has manifested. The macro level consists of White, modernist, male-oriented, and Western value-laden discourses and ideology (Kubota & Lin, 2009). The micro level limits professional

qualities by invalidating the educational and professional investment of many NNESTs and vitiates the professional psyche of many NNESTs. This is done by perpetuating a lack of self-confidence and low professional self-esteem and creating in instructors a schizophrenic state of mind (Medgyes, 1983), which leads to 'I-am-not-a-native-speaker syndrome' (Suárez, 2000) and 'impostor syndrome' (Bernat, 2008).

The assumption that NNESTs' main objective is to pursue native-like language performance is deeply rooted in years of indoctrination from the English Language Teaching industry constantly telling students, parents, and administrators that only NESTs could teach them "good" English and were the panacea for all their language deficiencies (Kiczkowiak, 2014). This discourse encouraged a falsehood that made language teachers turn a blind eye and believe that the native speaker is the ideal language teacher who is at the same time a model, a goal, and even an inspiration (Kamhi-Stein, 2014). On this note, researchers have argued that this myth should be eradicated since it divides the teaching profession into a caste system where teachers are stratified as completely different types of professionals (Amin, 2004; Kamhi-Stein 2016).

This controversy has allowed for an instruction paradigm shift away from learners aspiring to have native-like pronunciation to having them speak intelligibly. To understand this final outcome better, the notion of intelligibility needs to be described from three related components proposed by Smith (1992). These components are intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. The first one is understood as the learner's ability to recognize words and utterances. The second one deals with the listener's ability to recognize the meaning of words or utterances. Finally, interpretability involves the listener's ability to understand the speaker's intention. The main contribution of this shift is that it underlines that the main aim of teaching and learning of English is to guide students into communicating for real purposes rather than to

imitate native speakers (Kamhi-Stein, 2014).

The term “non-native English-speaking teacher” is said to have negative connotations as it defines a group for what they are not (Matsuda, 2003). Indeed, it emphasizes linguistic deficiencies and cultural shortcomings. Also, it presents a challenge for visible minorities such as second-generation immigrants who are native speakers as they do not fit into the tall, blond, blue-eyed stereotype (Kamhi-Stein, 2014). In light of this terminological struggle, the term Local English Teachers (LET) intends to be more inclusive and less discriminatory. In spite of its negative connotation, the term NNEST still prevails in current research on the topic (Anderson, 2016; Aslan & Thompson, 2016; Pae, 2017; Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016). The description of native-speakerism as an ideology that benefits a group while being detrimental to another one has been criticized by showing that both groups are affected negatively (Houghton & Rivers, 2013). Holliday (2013; 2015) suggested that using this dichotomy is a subjective and political matter. Consequently, some have suggested using both concepts in inverted commas to indicate to readers and writers that these terms are subjective, ideological, and value-laden (Holliday, 2013; 2015, Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016).

This linguistic dichotomy and the native speaker fallacy have privileged native speakers of English and positioned a global dominance of English that has created the term “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 2018).

English linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism relates to the transfer of a dominant language that comes with the ideology of extending a country's rule over foreign nations. Hence, this language transfer is a demonstration of power. In this linguistic transfer process, aspects of the dominant culture are transferred along with the language. Swann, Deumert, Lillis, & et. (2004) explained that most commonly linguistic imperialism refers to the

dominance of English as an international language or global language. Regarding English linguistic imperialism, Phillipson (1992) claimed that the dominance of English at the international level "is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstruction of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47). His most persuasive argument is that English linguistic imperialism is associated with cultural and economic forms of imperialism that systematically assert the dominance of Western countries and their cultures.

In terms of English language teaching in Costa Rica, Barrantes-Montero (2018) claimed that current English teacher formation devotes time and resources to implement limited curricula that entail an approach to language learning based on accuracy and communicative skills mostly. This approach ignores a critical thinking focus that could potentially question and problematize the current taken-for-granted world order. He suggested two main reasons for the lack of radical alternative ways of thinking "formal education is supported and financed by both domestic and international structures of power with a clear interest in maintaining the educational system as an instrument of keeping control of production means and dynamics. The other is the unfortunately fragmented production of real critical thinking and alternative approaches within the very Higher Education institutions." (p.3)

Power relations among diverse forms of English have been characterized by reproduced images of 'the superior Self' over 'the inferior Other' informed by Western superiority. In the case of Costa Rica, being a Latin American country, English-speaking economy comes from the United States. In that vein, English language learners and teachers have limited opportunities to use English out of the classroom and consequently they are not exposed to other English language varieties other than American. Standard American English (SAE) has enjoyed its

hegemony as a global language in the region, which, as explained by Guo and Beckett (2007), "is evidently a paradigm serving Western capitalism and neocolonialism" (p. 125). In the case of Latin America, this has created the misconception that SAE is the superior English language variety. This SAE empowerment has disempowered other varieties of English.

Much of the arguments that favour the native speaker as the preferred target for learners comes from the underlying ideology that English language ownership is grounded in the Inner Circle countries (Rose & Galloway, 2019). In the case of Costa Rica, it comes from the economic and cultural influence of the United States. Barrantes-Montero (2018), however, suggested that applied linguists in Costa Rica develop approaches to language teaching and learning in the local interest to respond to the immediate needs of the market and ignore the role of language learning as a means to add richness to speakers' life project. He noted that imperialism and power are not common issues included in teaching textbooks or the Costa Rican EFL classrooms. Phillipson (1992) recognized this phenomenon as the continuous reproduction of English as the language of world capitalism and world domination.

As a response to the negative effects of native-speakerism, different advocacy initiatives have tried to diminish the discriminatory positioning of NNESTs worldwide. One of these efforts dates back to 1996, when the NNESTs professionals' movement started at the US-based TESOL Association and aimed at increasing the status of these professionals (Kamhi-Stein, 2016). A more current effort is the one proposed by Aneja (2016), who provided an overview of a poststructuralist approach to language teacher identity to introduce (non)native speakering as a dynamic orientation. Her intention is to use this approach to frame both the historical origins and discursive (re)invention of (non)native speakered subjectivities. A strong initiative is World

Englishes, which emerged as a paradigm shift in the way language is identified, positioned, and spread as the language of others and not only a native privilege of some groups.

World Englishes and Global Englishes paradigms. An elaborated understanding of the categorization of Englishes is provided by Kachru's (1992) model, which divides countries into inner, outer, and expanding circles. The inner circle includes countries where English is the predominant tongue. The outer circle is inhabited by typically colonised territories in which English is a second language and used in different domains such as education, government, and the legislature and judiciary. Countries that use English as a lingua franca comprise the expanding circle, and it is considered a foreign language. Latin American countries are located in the expanding circle since English has a determining role in their economic development.

World Englishes describes the nativised and distinct varieties of English spoken in non-native countries. It challenges established linguistic assumptions that define a standard Anglo-based English. Indeed, this construct legitimizes different dialects and varieties of English. Advocates of World Englishes have pointed out how historical and linguistic processes are responsible for the spread and use of English around the world. In some of the places where English is used, this language has even gained official status and recognition. In this regard, Mahboob (2010) observed that experts on the topic have identified local varieties of the language that have resulted in what they call “indigenized” varieties, which as such should not be judged in relation to the Anglo (inner circle) Englishes.

Celce-Murcia (2014) elaborated on Berns’s (2008) argument that NNESTs are an integral part of World Englishes. They both paid attention to the idea that current international communication from countries from all circles makes it questionable to try to isolate the linguistic features of one particular English variety. The main conclusion is that English has

become a world language and that there are many varieties of English (native and non-native) so taking a monocentric view of English that believes there is only one acceptable standard is questionable. Added to this discussion is the notion that English is nowadays an international commodity, and consequently it is not possible to perceive it as the property of inner-circle speakers only (Kamhin-Stain, 2014).

The World Englishes initiative is rooted in recognizing and describing language varieties and linguistic pluralism. This initiative provoked the rewriting of discourses toward recognition of pluralism. However, a look into resources, attitudes, and perceptions of the role of English learning developed into the Kachru-Quirk controversy. In addition to his circle model, Kachru (1992) defends the role of context and the need for an English that is adapted to the local context to express its cultural and intellectual milieu best. From a different view, Quirk (1985) argued for a global standard to maintain comprehensibility among different nations. He postulated that a single standardized form of English should be the model for all non-native learners of English (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Quirk's ideas are known as *deficient linguistics* while Kachru's as *liberation linguistics*. World Englishes confronts criticism concerning its extreme dependence on national boundaries, the increasing cultural hybridity the world is currently facing, and the use of language. Expanding circles are using the language to address translingual practices across communities, other than those defined along national criteria. That is to say English is used not simply within the country but to serve transnational functions (Kirkpatrick, 2014). In spite of the controversy involving these two views, Brown (1991) proposed that the World Englishes perspective be integrated as part of teacher training, so that language learners work with actual data from around the world. By doing this, the World Englishes perspective will prevent

language teaching and learning from being abstract and potentially divorced from speakers' lives (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008).

One step beyond World Englishes is the Global Englishes paradigm. Rose and Galloway (2019) coined this paradigm in their interest to look at the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural diversity and fluidity of English use and users in a globalized world. As well as proponents of World Englishes, they recognize the notion of language varieties. More specifically, they focus their attention on the channel—in this case, globalization—through which English has been dispersed in the world and gained status as a global prestige language due to the economic and political power of English-speaking economies. In this case, Global Englishes does not see globalization as an inherently destructive force homogenizing the world. On the contrary, it takes a pluralist vision of English varieties that are usually disempowered. Global English has been influenced by global attitudes to the different varieties of English that make English language users have many varieties to choose and use.

Global Englishes is rooted in interrelated fields such as English as Lingua Franca, English as an International Language, Translanguaging and Translingual Practice, and the Multilingual Turn. As the extension of the idea of languaging, translanguaging is defined as the process where multilingual speakers use their languages as an integrated communication system (Canagarajah, 2011). On its part, translingual practice recognizes that there are not systematized languages instead there are semiotic language codes that are mobile and can be freely meshed in situated practice (Canagarajah, 2013). They both challenge the monolingual orientation of language and see languages as interwoven systems rather than separate entities.

World Englishes and Global Englishes both challenge the detrimental effect of the native speaker fallacy that permeates global discourses of English language teaching. On its part, World

Englishes, though criticized, has made significant contributions by challenging notions of standard language ideology and raising the legitimacy of the Englishes of countries in the Outer Circle (Rose & Halloway, 2019). Global Englishes emphasizes the spread and use of diverse forms of English in globalisation processes.

The native speaker fallacy has impacted NNESTs' identities since it frames the NNESTs as deficient. Teachers' identities are negotiated in relation to the larger social world, and in this sense NNESTs struggle with acceptance and labeling issues that result from their interaction with their social world. Added to this, their identities are conditioned to their self-perception, self-esteem, view of accent, and awareness of the influence of their voice. As Norton (2013) stated, working with and understanding identity offers the field of language learning a comprehensive theory that integrates the learner and the social world. It also acknowledges the multiple positions from which learners can speak. In her words, "through human agency, language learners who struggle to speak from one identity position may be able to reframe their relationship with others and claim alternative, more powerful identities" (p. 3).

Language, culture, power and identity. Identity is a human attribute that is established out of congruence between self-perception and the perceptions of others. Drawing on Erichsen (2011), this attribute allows people to see themselves from the perspective of others, which eventually helps form a conception of themselves within their experienced social context. Language, culture, and social roles are all implicated in individuals' negotiation of identity. Studies about the relationship between language and identity have resulted in a poststructuralist theory of language, which holds that linguistic communities are heterogeneous and characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power where language is not a neutral medium of communication (Norton, 2010). Power is implicated in the understanding of identity and

language. In this regard, Norton (2010) agreed with Bourdieu (1977) in stating that there is value attributed to speech that cannot be separated from the person who speaks and this person, at the same time, cannot be understood separate from larger social relationships and networks around him or her.

This poststructuralist view also ascertains that identity is not static but a "fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances" (Norton & Toohey, 2011). It is in this conversation of power and language where native-speakerism takes central stage in the construction of NNESTs' identity.

Native-speakerism's early definition placed it as an ideological construct that saw native speakers as the ideal model. However, more recent work has configured it as a contemporary social problem that not only includes beliefs but also social practices of stereotyping and discrimination. In the words of Houghton and Rivers (2013),

> Native-speakerism is prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination, typically by or against foreign language teachers, on the basis of either being or not being perceived and categorised as a native speaker of a particular language.… Its endorsement positions individuals from certain language groups as being innately superior to individuals from other language groups (p. 14).

It is under this conceptualization that local English teachers are placed in an unprivileged social position because, in spite of the fact that they are well trained and accredited in accordance with the requirements of their respective countries, their English proficiency is perceived as a barrier. Native-speakerism has a remarkable influence on hiring practices, working conditions, salaries, social stigmatisation and teachers' perception of self. It is, then, undeniable that social assumptions and practices directly influence the way adult educators in this scenario see

themselves.

Given that NNESTs are language learners themselves, theories of identity that integrate the language learner and their context become determinant in the understanding of the conditions they interact with. As Norton (2013) explained, language learners are actively engaged in decisions about the interactions with members of the target language community and about the role of motivation in their access to communities. Interest in motivation has drawn attention to affective factors that are "frequently constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual" (p. 45). Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2015) noted that identity comes into play each time people interact with others. They asserted that we engage in multiple identities as a result of our stable and momentary roles and affiliations. In their words, some identities are said to be attributed to others while others are maintained by the individual.

Language instructors, as complex professional selves, deal with the constructed self-understandings of what it means to be a good professional. The way teachers construct self-understandings of what it means to be NNESTs is linked to their identity construction and their capacity to act in their surroundings. This capacity to act is called agency, and, according to some theorists, it may be a complete human rational decision or a choice determined by social forces. In either case, teachers' agency seems to be a determining factor in the way they shape, resist, and negotiate teaching practices to create a place for themselves in spite of their linguistic differences.

Defining Agency

The concept of agency is rooted in the social sciences (Archer, 2003; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1984); however, different notions of agency has arisen in various social fields. In

sociology, for example, agency is usually contrasted with the concept of structure where agency is a synonym for action while structure represents the determinism of structural theories. A definition of agency from this perspective is the ability of individuals to act independently of the determining constraints of social structure (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This discussion originated the 'structure-agency debate' in the 1970s and 1980s when sociologists increased their attention to the analysis of power relations and conflict.

Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä and Paloniemi (2013) traced historical lines of the definition of agency. They mentioned that post-structural gender research had asked questions of agency and theorizing, which have resulted in contested approaches. A strong research tendency is the use of discourse analysis as a means to understand how language is connected to knowledge and power relations in social practices. Consequently, discourses are not only linguistic entities but ways of thinking and acting in the world. Another line of discussion of agency is strong post-structuralism in education. This line suggested that agency manifests itself through language and discourses and exists as a social and collective phenomenon. Strong post-structuralism acknowledges the need for collective agency conceptualization and the need to theorize agency in terms of individual identity by including emotional aspects (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013).

Emerging socio-cultural approaches to the understanding of agency recognize that socio-cultural contexts play an important role. These contexts include objects that mediate human activities. These approaches differ, however, in the way they recognize individual and group levels. One notion proposes that social interaction represents social reality and the fundamental nature of reality. Another approach suggests that situated social practice represents social reality. A final line of discussion of agency is life-course research which examines how "individuals

construct their life within the social conditions they live in" (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013, p. 57). This view of agency requires a focus on the interplay between past experiences, the present and orientations towards the future as it is not only a quality people poses but something they do in different contexts. Under this framework, research that combines identity, agency and structure is common practice.

A last note on defining agency is that although much of the discussion is informed by social theory and social psychology, this discussion goes back to earlier philosophical work on questions about human freedom. Consequently, it could be predicted that questions and answers of agency are, and will continue to be, a constant.

Teachers' professional agency. In order to understand individual adult educators' life histories, it is necessary to recognize the role of language and rurality in informing professional agency. Theoretically, agency has been a topic of interest in fields such as education, psychology, working-life studies, gender research, and policy. It has been linked to the main understandings of lifelong learning and working life. Its roots are said to be in the social sciences; however, its influence in education is indisputable since there is a tight connection between agency and educational and learning practices. Education is said to guide people to develop their capacities for agentic and autonomous action (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013). On this note, Freire (2002) described the difference between living and existing, where living is merely surviving while existing implies a deeper involvement in the process of re-creating and transforming. But for these two processes to exist, individuals need to identify the "dialectal relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom" (p. 99). It is only through agentic and autonomous actions that people make learning decisions as a result of their self- and socially imposed limits and their recognized freedom.

Following Mezirow's (1981) influential model of adult learning, human agency is defined in terms of empowerment through emancipatory adult learning. However, agency, in his perspective, has a strong individualized commitment where the idea of self-determination is key. Currently, agency is not strictly understood through individual aspects; on the contrary, social and contextual aspects such as social class, race, gender, as well as economic and occupational conditions strongly influence its understanding as a collective concept. Added to these social power structures is the life-course notion of professional agency, a process needed in changing working life conditions and in which people are required to engage in meaningful, multifaceted career trajectories and to commit to lifelong learning (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013).

Life-course professional agency. The human life lens investigates and examines the way individuals construct their life within the social conditions they live in. Under this umbrella, agency incorporates the different ways individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within historical and social opportunities and constraints (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013). From a sociological perspective, Hitlin and Elder (2007) elaborated on four types of agency that differ in their temporal scope since they go from the present moment to long-term future life plans. These four types are: existential, pragmatic, identity, and life-course agency. Existential agency refers to self-directed and self-initiated human action. Pragmatic agency refers to habitual responses to social action where internalized identity commitments motivate those actions. Identity agency represents the habitual patterning of social behaviour and captures the identity commitments individuals have internalized. Finally, life-course agency refers to an extended temporal horizon

that includes people's reflexive capacities to incorporate goals and beliefs about their ability to reach such goals.

Another approach, the subject-centred, sociocultural approach, focuses on how professional agency is resourced, constrained, and bounded by contextual factors. The way individuals think, act, and learn is tightly influenced by their surroundings. The sociocultural conditions of adult educators include material circumstances, physical artifacts, work cultures, subject positions, power relations, and discourses (Eteläpelto, 2008). Undoubtedly, power relations and discourse also determine adult educators' view of their reality and of what Bourdieu (1991) defined as mental representations. This discursive reality is manifested through language social forms, hegemonic discourses, and official and non-official power relations (Billet 2006; Eteläpeto 2008, 2013). One example of this power is the "native speaker fallacy" which has become a hegemonic discourse in the debates concerning the legitimization of NNESTs. This power is not only an imposed practice but also has been the subject of "the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu, 1991). It is in this context that NNESTs around the world, but mainly in expanding-circle countries, have built their professional agency in emerging regions with economic limitations.

Bourdieu (1991) linked the idea of region with the notion of mental representations by emphasizing that in social practice, regional and ethnic identity are the object of "acts of perception and appreciation, of cognition and recognition, in which agents invest their interests and their presuppositions" (p. 220). This idea gives structural context (history, socioeconomic conditions, institutional ethos, cultural patterns) an influential role in adult educators' exercise of agency. This process, in fact, is seen as a socially constrained process already influenced by social relations which, at the same time, are an outcome of power relations.

Deeply attached to the notion of life-course agency are the concepts of identity and structure. In this matter, agency is viewed as the ways "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003, p. 11). From this perspective, Ecclestone (2007) defined agency as adults' capacity for autonomous, empowered action and related it to transitions by determining that agency should be understood as a dynamic interplay between contexts, times, and the influences from the past and engagement with the present and the future.

Biesta and Tedder (2007) also explored the relationship between agency and different types of learning throughout the life course. They defined agency as temporally constructed engagements by adults in different temporal-relational contexts. Through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, adults reproduce and transform these contexts in interactive response to the challenges caused by always changing historical situations.

Considering that being an educator develops over time, this study views professional agency through a life-course lens, which includes educators' past experiences, their present events, and their future extended horizon. These all inform educators' decisions and actions. In addition to the temporal element, contextual factors in educators' careers inform their professional agency, as influenced by the conditions, power relations, and discourses that surround them. But their engagement is not determined by structural environments only; individuals' beliefs and capacities play a role as well. More specifically this study views professional agency as the engagement of adult educators when making choices, influencing others, and taking stances on their work and professional identities. This engagement considers educators' negotiation of their individual characteristics and social patterning.

Professional agency in context. In achieving professional agency, adult educators manage to juggle their individualistic explanations of social action, the particularities of their regional and local communities, and their institutional ethos. Workplace boundaries are marked by the activities and duties each individual carries out (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010). However, these boundaries can also be seen as potential challenges for some educators who, instead of being indifferent, decide to contest their established roles and responsibilities. The attitude of educators regarding their agency might be linked to the extent to which they place work at the centre of their personal and collective identities (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010).

As Jarvis (2006) stressed, we live in a complex world and it is difficult to isolate individual factors from our surroundings. Living in the world means we have to interact with it. Adult educators' professional agency is a product of that interaction and presupposes a degree of autonomy, "but it does not mean that individuals will be able to exercise that autonomy since we live in rule-governed society" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 126). The idea of individuals as "choosers" exemplifies how they are free to choose what to do in given situations.

Educators around the world are called to become agents of change in spite of what it might mean in each institutional context. The movement of educators through their life course requires attention to their trajectories and pathways. While trajectories are attributed to the individual, pathways are an attribute of a social system. Individuals, then, navigate their institutional pathways as systems that are moulded by cultural and structural forces (Pallas, 2003). Groen and Kawalilak (2004) offered the metaphor of pathways of adult learning to illustrate the diverse landscape adult learners and educators' journey, where the diversity of experiences and activities guide and inform them. These pathways lead to a series of connected human networks along the way, where factors, elements, and influences impact educators' and learners' life narratives.

High agentic individuals are recognized for their courage in stepping out beyond their assumptions, beliefs, agendas, and practices to exert intentional influence on their lives, careers, and circumstances of living.

The idea of institutional ethos as a set of ideals (Voronov & Weber, 2017) adds precision to the understanding of institutions as it offers an account of unique historical experiences and their set of cultural values, norms, religious precepts, and taboos. Institutional ethos refers to implicit or unwritten codes of conduct (Lusthaus, Adrien, Anderson, Carden & Plinio, 2002). In higher education, institutional ethos is usually defined as the patterns (mission, beliefs, practices, assumptions) which guide the behavior either of individuals or groups in an institution, which at the same time illuminate the frames of reference so that the meanings of events and actions on and off campus can be interpreted (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Howman, Lane & Kinser, 2011). Only by acknowledging each institution's frame of reference can the professional agency of adult educators be interpreted.

Higher education institutions are situated within dominant forces of the global economy. Jarvis (2008) elaborated on the idea of globalization by explaining both the multilayered model of society (Jarvis, 2008) that ranks international, national, regional, and local forces as well as how greater power and influence stem from international organizations. This power makes higher educational institutions vulnerable to the pressures of their own ethos and to the external inequalities. These pressures influence the opportunities and constraints that educators have. Drawing on the Freirean notion of conscious beings, adult educators exist in a dialectical relationship between their determination of limits in their contexts and their own freedom to make decisions and construct their life within the social conditions they live in (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013; Freire, 2002).

Achieving professional agency in rural higher education. Even when there is a collective understanding of the concept of a rural area, there is not a uniform definition. However, a multi-criteria effort to define it concluded that rural areas are spaces where a small landscape is occupied by human settlement and infrastructure, communities have low demographic density, and where activities are affected by a high transaction cost caused by long distances from cities (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003). Bracken (2008) elaborated on Galbraith's (1992) definition by describing rural areas as those that have limited resource bases and have cultural and ethnic homogeneity. They also agreed that rural areas are subject to a lack of acknowledgment of issues such as poverty, conflict, transportation challenges, and brain drain. It is under this scenario that education has been recognized as a primary point of intervention in addressing the needs of rural communities (Schafft, 2010). Higher education, particularly in those areas, requires well-designed academic programs, a clear mission, high-quality faculty, committed students, and sufficient resources to be able to perform to a consistently high standard (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003).

The challenges of higher education institutions in rural areas are determined by the characteristics of the region. For Latin American higher education, Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner, and Bal (2005) reported that one of these challenges is "to provide learning, research, and job opportunities for talented individuals to ensure a sufficient supply of advanced skills to their national economies" (p. 39). In this quest, the Latin American region has witnessed enrollment in higher education double in the past decades. However, larger enrollment numbers do not translate into high quality education. Rural higher education is challenged by the conflict over the two-sided purpose of schooling. One side encourages the preparation of students to contribute to national interests and needs, while the other side advocates for rural education that

serves local community interests (Schafft, 2010; Portnoi & Bagley, 2014). Regional campuses, which are located in rural communities, deal with conflict between national and local forces that have their own agendas, and only by recognizing these forces can agents be accountable and recognize the real challenges (Jarvis, 2008). By questioning to whom education is accountable, higher education institutions may understand how to effectively respond to challenges (Schafft, 2010).

Rural adult educators are the ones in the trenches. In their particular settings, there are no universal standards that can measure their success. They can take a myriad of avenues to their teaching; however, they should not forget the role of local traditions and the public voice (Portnoi & Bagley, 2014). Rural adult educators are challenged by the uneven distribution and concentration of resources within main/central campuses, which usually have the highest social strata of students (Atencio & Brand, 2016; Valimaa, Aittola & Ursin, 2014), while they struggle with limited academic offerings and programs (Atencio & Brand, 2016; Rodríguez, 2006). This concentration of resources and information outside the rural areas may negatively influence their ability to attend to social justice. The main reason is that this unfair concentration of resources limits access and challenges both equality and equity. To confront their challenges, educators must reflect on their current practice and improve their knowledge and skills (Brancato, 2003; Rodríguez, 2006). Here is where agency plays a determinant role in their profession since active exertion of influence elucidates their capacity to transform themselves and their environment.

To achieve active agency, rural adult educators should take into account the nature and manifestations of it. These manifestations are always specified in terms of the multiple ways and purposes agency is exercised in accordance with local contextual conditions, the material

circumstances, physical artefacts, power relations, work cultures, dominant discourses, and subject positions available (Castro, 2011; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013).

Summary

Developing a solid understanding of what it is like to be an adult educator within each particular context helps to exercise active professional agency in spite of the adversities. Non-native English-speaking adult educators on regional campuses should identify the way they negotiate their work identities and professional subjectivities so that the challenges of geography, resources, and language do not influence their decisions for action negatively. Added to this, NNESTs deserve attention since they are a global majority. Indeed, about 80% of English language teaching professionals around the globe are believed to be NNESTs (Selvi, 2016).

From the gaps I have identified in the field through this literature review, I suggest that deeper local research is needed. This research strand should emphasize the ways in which higher education in rural areas must be accountable to students and recognize the purpose of schooling. Educators should be aware that higher education is intended to enhance students' equal opportunities for success even when the regionalization of education, for instance in Costa Rica, has not brought the same kind of opportunity to rural areas (Atencio & Brand, 2016; Rodríguez, 2006). This regionalization focus derives from the regional strategy of national planning to classify vulnerable communities that would need balanced development among all regions nationwide (Arauz, Schmidt & Tabash, 2012).

Knight (2013) has reported efforts in Latin America to support regional level initiatives to promote the establishment and alignment of higher education. However, none of these initiatives can be made possible if faculty do not exert thoughtful influence. This influence must be preceded by both the exercising of action with long-term implications and departing from

situated agency that entails a self-reflective belief about one's capacity to achieve goals (Hitlin & Elder, 2007) within a specific situationality (Freire, 2002). Experts in rural higher education in Costa Rica have called for more autonomous development in those institutions (Atencio & Brand, 2016; Rodríguez, 2006) and identified the need for agents in education to move forward thinking that it is possible to overcome the challenges they face (Castro, 2011; Freire, 2002).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> "Life histories and narratives inhabit the heartland of subjectivity and explore the multiple ways in which our subjective perceptions and representations relate to our understandings and our actions" (Goodson, 2017, p. 3).

In this chapter, I first describe the research methodology I used to carry out this study. I begin by explaining my epistemological and ontological orientation as well as how social constructivism is in line with the purpose of this study. Next I offer an exploration of qualitative research, narrative inquiry, and, finally, life history—the research design I chose for this study. I also discuss the participant recruitment process, data gathering methods, and the data analysis and interpretation processes. This chapter concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Epistemological and Ontological Orientation

Epistemology is understood as both the process of thinking and the relationship between what we know and what we see, while ontology refers to the worldviews and assumptions that we, as researchers, hold in our search for new knowledge (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). As part of the process of determining the research methodology and design of my study, I must first acknowledge my positionality as researcher. In reflecting on my epistemological and ontological stances, I recognize that I view the world through a naturalist lens, interpreting experiences subjectively in their natural settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) and understanding knowledge as both individually and socially constructed via multiple interpretations. For me, the study of the human endeavour as a complex, subjective, and interpretative experience, is worth knowing. I believe that individuals function in a world in which struggles for power lead to interactions between those who are privileged and those who are oppressed (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). One way to confront oppression and advocate for transformation is to seek dialogic

spaces, and to attain this, it is worth remembering that there is no dialogue without listening. Approaching adult educators to listen to their narratives is the first step to starting a dialogue about the professional agency of NNESTs on regional campuses.

In my current comprehension of my dual role of educator-researcher, the labels of rationalist, naturalist, objective, subjective, qualitative, quantitative, commensurable, incommensurable, valid, and reliable are presented to me as a kaleidoscope in which synergies—rather than polarizations—light the way and fascinate me. I tried to control the illusion of colours to be able to build relationships between existing theoretical and methodological traditions from my past history and the present and future representations that may influence my perspective on educational research. At this point, I clearly understand that there is no particular methodology or practice that is privileged over another.

In this research study, I focused on the collective generation and construction of the meaning behind the experiences of the study's participants. I intended to be actively involved with my participants in the processes of discovery and construction of what it means to be an educator in their particular social conditions. I viewed this research opportunity as a situated activity that located me in their world. My involvement required an understanding of their practices in their natural contexts. On that account, I was inclined to choose depth over breadth in my understanding, and as such I approached a small number of participants for intensive exploration rather than a large number of educators for superficial engagement (Cole & Knowles, 2001). I provided thick description of events and analyzed all data collected. This was no easy task since I acknowledge that the meaning of their personal experiences resulted in multiple realities and not one single truth. These ideas are core principles of the social-constructivist approach that aligns with my research beliefs and values.

Social constructivism. The core principle of social constructivism is that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed, and this drives research to understanding social phenomena from a context-specific perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The central assumption of this paradigm is that individuals construct their reality from the subjective meanings they develop. These meanings come from their personal experiences, which at the same time generate multiple realities. The lives of participants are not restricted to their individual perceptions and interpretations; instead, they incorporate interactions with other members of society and their surroundings (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Life is not context-free since individuals are constantly touched by events, relationships, ideas, economic circumstances, place of living, and educational systems, as well as cultural patterns associated with each.

Having explored my ontological and epistemological positionality, now I refer to my methodological stance. I must be honest with myself and state that because of the way I acknowledge the experiences, interpretations, and understandings of the complexities of the social and cultural world, I am more aligned with the qualitative paradigm as described below.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative paradigm consists of discussing a situated activity through an interpretive and naturalist approach to the world. It locates the observer-researcher in the world and makes the world visible through a set of interpretative practices. Qualitative researchers study individuals in their natural settings and attempt to make sense of the meanings people bring to their situated activities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This paradigm allowed me to develop a natural understanding of the complexities of the sociocultural world of adult learning. I was interested in experiencing, interpreting, and understanding the social situations of other adult educators by

entering into their world. I intentionally placed an emphasis on discovering and interpreting the meaning of their experiences in the life course of their careers. I was aware of the challenges of developing a contextual understanding and maintaining design flexibility. However, by acknowledging these challenges, I was able to navigate the necessary processes behind this study in a mindful and cautious manner.

This study was qualitative in nature since I pursued a detailed understanding of adult educators' trajectories when achieving their professional agency that came from participants' voices and their perspectives. On this note, Creswell (2014) affirmed that in this approach "the research seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants" (p. 19). From among different traditions of qualitative research, narrative inquiry aligned best with my interest in capturing adult educators' stories in the form of personal narratives.

Narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry can take many forms, however what they all have in common is their interest in honouring lived human experience as a source of knowledge and understanding. Their focus is not limited to people's experiences since they explore social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional narratives. By approaching stories in this way, a narrative inquiry studies the individual's experience in the world (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For this study, narrative inquiry focused on acknowledging the episodical order of the reconstruction of the multilayered stories as told by the participants (Bloomerg & Volpe, 2016; Cole & Knowles, 2001). Assuming that a good narrative research design involves reporting individuals' stories of their lived experiences, this narrative provides a detailed account of adult educators' experiences and how they interact with their surroundings. The narrative inquiry for this study is designed with three objectives in mind: allowing for teacher reflection, recognizing teachers' knowledge, and bringing teachers' voices to the front (Cortazzi, 1993). From the

multiple forms that narrative inquiry can assume, I chose a life history approach.

Life history. This type of narrative includes experiences in the lives of the participants in their journey as adult educators and enables a deep level of analysis of events by focusing on turning points and significant events in their lives (Angrosino, 1989; Cole & Knowles, 2001). Added to this, the historical context of these narratives was understood in relation to participants' personal time, which Goodson (2017b) described as "the way each person develops phases and patterns according to personal dreams, objectives or imperatives across the life-course" (p. 19). Life history made it possible for adult educators to represent a set of dimensions of their experiences and explain certain relevant aspects of their lives, such as feelings, objectives, and desires. Based on tacit or experiential knowledge, teachers had the opportunity to increase the value of their experiences by exploring, making sense of, and validating the events that have happened to them (Souza, 2014).

I focused this study on exploring aspects of language learning, context, and professional agency of adult educators. More specifically, this inquiry captured how the perceptions of adult educators' life experiences as non-native English speakers impacted their past, current, and potential professional agency, and how the rural context of their professional lives informs their professional agency. This study did not ignore the context of these stories; on the contrary, it scrutinized influential structures. Added to this, and in conjunction with what Bolivar (2017) has stated, life history narrative in Latin America has become more important with time. This type of research is especially important in the demand for the personal and emotional dimensions in social science research that comes as a result of postmodern interest in the individuals' word as a component of their experiences, memories and identities.

I drew on McAdams' (2017) understanding of how life stories can be a model of identity construction. Specifically, he identified four aspects of life stories: nuclear episodes, imagoes (characters that dominate life stories), the ideological setting, and a generativity script. The context in which adult educators live and work is an influencing factor in the production of these four aspects of a life history. Fortunately, life history acknowledges that life is not context-free; on the contrary, it is recognized as "a vehicle for this understanding, as it allows for the exploration of the intersection between the individual's life and the context within which that life has been and is lived" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 134). It was vitally important for this study to examine the life of individual educators and recognize the various social, political, and cultural contexts at play in their individual stories.

Research Methods

Most data were gathered directly from the adult educators in the form of narrative stories through life history interviews. However, I also drew on a researcher's reflexivity journal and supplementary documentation, like private documents from participants and publicly available papers. By incorporating different sources of data, this research process hopefully resulted in fully contextualized narratives (Goodson, 2017c).

Participants recruitment. The sites for this study were five different regional campuses of one of the five public universities in Costa Rica. This institution was preferred to the other four because of its openness and accessibility. In addition, as a researcher, I have a connection with one of the campuses, as I am an adult educator there. However, to provide a complete understanding of the topic and compare experiences among sites, the other four regional campuses were included. These campuses are located in economically and socially challenged communities in four different provinces. The provinces are Guanacaste, Heredia, San José and

Puntarenas and the communities are Liberia, Nicoya (Guanacaste), Sarapiquí (Heredia), Pérez Zeledón (San José) and Corredores (Puntarenas).

The participants in this study were identified and selected using specific criteria. In order to obtain information-rich cases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), purposive sampling determined a profile for possible participants who have key attributes. First, this profile included participants' self-identification as non-native English-speaking adult educators. Also, these educators should have worked on a regional campus for at least five years. Another criterion was that participants had to have passed the stabilization stage in their career cycle as described by Huberman (1989). He established that teachers in this stage have a firm commitment to their career which was a necessary characteristic in my interest to assure teachers' would continue to be teachers by the end of the the study and would have enough teaching experience to share in their narratives. A significant consideration in selecting participants was their understanding the nature of their commitment as informants, as life history interviews are typically extensive.

A set of considerations reflects my concern for following an ethic of care (Denzin, 2017). First, once participants were identified, they were invited through a letter that explained in detail the research and its characteristics, the commitment expected from them, and the researcher's commitment. Informants' voluntary participation and possible withdrawal was explicit and discussed right at the beginning stages. They signed a consent form that guaranteed confidentiality. As a narrative researcher, I recognized my duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives I studied in order to contribute to knowledge (van den Hoonaard, 2017). They were asked to choose a pseudonym that assured their confidentiality. I collected, analyzed, and reported data without compromising the identities of the informants, to protect them from harm, distress, or fear of reprisal.

Added to my commitment to building rapport with the informants, as a researcher I took seriously my commitment to avoid harm and fear by being mindful of elements of their stories that should not be made public (van den Hoonaard, 2017). Corroborating the interpretation of key findings took place before writing this dissertation. Participants read their transcripts and narrative portraits before the data analysis process started. Some participants requested to delete some sections in the interviews and clarified some events.

Interviews and the interview process. At the root of interviewing people about their lives is the researcher's interest in understanding the meaning they make of their stories (Seidman, 2013). One-to-one interview conversations between participants and the researcher is most commonly used in a life history methodology, and this was the main method of data gathering for this study. It is the nature of life history interviews to let participants know that these interviews are meant to be a space where their experiences, viewpoints, and interpretations are central (Horsdal, 2017), and that they are free conversations in which every story matters.

Based on the notion that this research followed a more natural process, questions took the form of guiding themes. As Cole and Knowles (2001) have remarked, "the guiding part of the conversation comes about because we do have a purpose and we usually have limited temporal and spatial resources" (p. 72). Following these ideas, the questions were open-ended because they were meant to generate wide narratives that provided in-depth explorations of adult educators' lives in context.

As the researcher, I was aware that I needed to be emotionally sensitive to exercise caution, mainly when unpredictable events arose in the interview. I knew that conducting these interviews would pose heavy challenges for both the interviewer and the interviewee. These challenges usually take the form of emotional trials when sharing distressful experiences about hegemonic

power and ideas. During the interviews, participants were invited to share as much or as little as they wanted. They were also informed about the possibility of deleting certain elements from the transcripts. In fact, some of the participants requested I delete some sections as they found them sensitive. They also clarified ideas and asked to rephrase their narratives.

In terms of narrative and historical truth, these interviews were conducted with a recognition that working with past events and narratives is influenced by memory, time, place, context, audience, and relationship (Bolen & Adams, 2017). Even when the authenticity of the memories can be challenged, the meaning and the significance of the events remained as the participants' creation of mind. As a researcher, my position is that the stories shared by the participants were stories they remembered, and those stories reflected who they are and how they store and see events in their lives. I was guided by the principle that "in the reconstruction of a life, everything is relevant" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 35). On this matter, Langness and Frank (1981) stressed that "if memory is selective, then there must be a prior structure of personal identity that provides the template by which certain events are cast as images significant enough to be stored" (p. 109). Every image represents and reveals elements of participants' identities. This assertion informs my understanding that everything participants narrated in the interviews represented how they portrayed themselves, both the way they thought about themselves and the way they thought they were viewed by the world.

For this research, the whole interview process was composed of one initial meeting followed by three separate interviews. The key principles of life history narrative, relationality, mutuality, empathy and care, explain the commitment to working together, participants and researcher, over a period of several months. This inquiry process requires hours of guided conversations with participants that ensure authentic engagement. The purpose of the first meeting was to invite the

research participant into an understanding of the topic, purpose, expectations, research design, consent, and procedures. Subsequently, the first interview was the opening step in the sharing and collection of data. The next interview focused on expanding the information generated from the initial interview and obtaining more detailed information about the participant. In the second interview, participants were invited to suggest possible topics they thought might contribute to the construction of their histories. The last interview was a space to maintain a dialogue in which participants and the researcher exchanged opinions about the accuracy of representation in their narratives. Each interview varied in duration and range from one hour and twenty minutes to two hours and fifteen minutes.

Following a semi-structured approach, these interviews were guided by areas of interest derived from the research purpose and questions (see Appendix A). These areas are personal and career histories, early experiences of being a university language instructor, the context and issues associated with professional agency. The first area intended to give value to the personal histories of adult educators and to recognize that before becoming one each individual had a past. My intention in capturing narratives of their early years as language instructors was to reflect on how their journeys started, establish some common teaching practices, and identify which decisions were critical and which changes have contributed to their evolution. Then, analyzing the participants' environment was important since individuals construct their identities by using the cultural and social repertoire that surrounds them. Finally, addressing issues associated with professional agency had the potential to supply the tools for understanding the adult educators' beliefs, capacities, and competences to act and achieve within geographical and linguistic barriers.

Researcher's reflexivity journal. The researcher's reflexivity journal took the form of field notes that "record impressions, thoughts, ideas, questions and puzzles" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 90) that arose during the data gathering process. My primary reason for including this method was to open my assumptions to scrutiny. By keeping an ongoing written record of what I expected before the interviews, what I observed during the interviews, and what I concluded after questioning my assumptions has helped me have an open self-analysis. Added to this, I intended to follow up the questions and puzzles I had following the interviews. In that way, I was able to analyze elements that otherwise would have gotten lost in the data gathering and analysis processes.

My hope was that this process of reflection would bring the unconscious into consciousness in order to avoid having my personal agenda influence the collection and analysis of data. The interviews were limited spaces that needed following up; that is why recording my impressions of the participants' responses spurred new questions that were checked during the following interviews. The journal process I used included three stages: before, during, and after the interviews (see Appendix B). For the first stage, the journal outlined expectations and fears in the form of predictions of anticipated and unanticipated events. During the interviews, I followed Lamb's (2013) suggestion to structure the research journal, dividing each page of the research journal into four sections. Section one recorded what went well (how is it decided what goes well and what doesn't go well?), section two recorded what did not go so well, section three recorded key learning points from the experience or take-aways, and section four referred to themes (feelings, events, pauses, gestures) that needed to be addressed in the follow-up interviews. Finally, during the after-interview stage, I gathered all the information from the before and during process and wrote descriptions in the form of a memo.

I was cognizant of the significant role of reflection in my research process and I identified with Lamb's (2013) statement that "reflecting on different aspects of the research process when writing a research journal provides a forum to record concerns which may have otherwise been lost, or simply not considered" (p. 85). The reflective component of this data gathering tool involved what Boyd and Fales (1989) identified as an action concerned with "the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (present or past) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the real world)" (p. 101).

Supplementary documentation. I collected already existing public and private documents to help get a full contextualization of time and place. These documents, however, were not the core of the analysis, as they were used to accompany stories. The public documents inventory included institutional documents that were publicly accessible and that helped clarify administrative, curricular, and teaching decisions. The purpose behind collecting this type of document was to enrich my understanding of the data from perspectives other than those of the participants. Examples of these public documents include websites, brochures, event invitations, and institutional documents. Private documents were provided by the participants, and, with certain ethical considerations in mind, their use was determined by their owners. These artifacts included photographs, career timelines, and diagrams they designed for the purpose of this research (Appendix C). The analysis of these resources helped me to understand both their teaching practices and how those practices influenced their professional agency.

Understanding the different types of artifacts available was of significant importance for this life history research. Cole and Knowles (2001) provided three categories that clarify their possible uses. They identified artifacts that are primary information about a life (birth certificates, school reports, resumes), artifacts that are primarily representation of a life (family

and personal photographs, diaries, logs), and artifacts that are related to the context of a life (historical and institutional documents). Based on the premise that words are not always sufficient to communicate meaning (Chase, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2007), these artifacts were used to supplement what was observed and analyzed during the interviews. Common sense and intuition may also play a key role in analyzing what was behind those artifacts. The researcher and the participants sought to make connections between the documents and the context.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Building on studies by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goodson and Sikes (2017), and Riessman (2008) in terms of data analysis and interpretation processes, I developed a chronology of events for the stories of my participants. The interviews took the form of chronological guiding, revisiting participants' past and present and looking at their projective future. When the first stage of the interview process was completed, the data were compiled individually. From the specific lens of the life history design, data from the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data collected from the reflexivity journal resulted in reflection and documentation of the research experience and impressions of the participants' responses. This process generated new questions for the second and third round of interviews, recorded thoughts on emerging topics and guided my search for supplementary documents. As the only researcher, I transcribed stories myself, as this process enabled me to become familiar with the data and aided in the analysis of ideas and themes that emerged as a consequence of repetitive listening and intimate engagement with the stories (Goodson & Sikes, 2017). I produced complete transcriptions from the interviews instead of summaries.

No ready-made template existed to organize the data obtained from the narratives. However, I organized the information in the form of a chronology of events or life phases, which also

accounted for different categories of information and source types (Cole & Knowles, 2001). This task implied reading and making notes, leaving and meditating, rereading without notes, making new notes, matching notes, rereading and so on (Horsdal, 2017). Stories were coded using an open coding first cycle followed by a narrative coding. Coding through the use of gerunds allowed for an analysis of actions, allowing for an active and critical analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Upon the collection of codes, information was then separated into emerging themes and woven into narratives and analysis that described personal journeys in their exercise of professional agency. These emerging themes were further analyzed by categorizing information through pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016) (see Appendix D). The result was a list of eight major theme descriptions (see Appendix E). During this time, participants reviewed their written tape transcripts and corroborated my interpretations. My next step was to revisit major themes from the narratives. This process produced a further series of questions for participants that invited them to focus on key points in their experiences in achieving professional agency. A third interview was scheduled with each participant to answer follow-up questions and to share their ideas about the thematic interpretation of the data. This was an act of collaboration, making this research study a joint creation (Goodson, 2017) by giving participants an active part in the study and serving to verify my own interpretations of the information.

Following life history characteristics, the data analysis included an understanding of the historical and social context in which the events of the stories took place. By locating lives in their historical time and context, this study made sure that the narratives were neither individualized nor decontextualized. In this way, the analysis of data put the individual life narrative back together with the collective context experience (Goodson, 2017b). In seeking to

obtain this broad perspective of adult learners' professional agency, a life-course approach provided a temporal orientation that helped me to understand participants' temporally constructed engagement with their different structural environments (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013). As Goodson (2017a) advised, by moving from stories to full life histories and by building a life-course analysis, this study increases the possibilities for understanding the way time and context impact participants' lives.

Reflexivity in Research

My first step when incorporating reflexivity in my data analysis was to contemplate and make explicit how my background may have played a part in my research. I came to this study with my personal EFL teacher journey, motivation, and assumptions which allowed me to come to terms in knowing the self within the process of the research itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Teaching on a regional campus for more than 16 years in Costa Rica and moving to Canada to complete my Ph.D. program as a non-native speaker of English found me asking myself a myriad of questions about teacher professional agency.

Reflexivity in research offered me the opportunity as a researcher to come to terms with my choice of research focus, with those with whom I engaged in the research process, and with myself. The need to emphasize how reflexivity shaped my study was never ignored. I was present in every moment during the period of my research. The researcher journal was a tool I used to acknowledge the importance of documenting my thoughts and feelings for reflection, as suggested by Simons (2009). Through my field notes in the journal, I took cognizance of personal reflections and acknowledged my biases before, during and after the interviews. I was present at all times and ensured my biases were made explicit.

Through prospective reflexivity, I recognized that my research explored EFL teachers' professional agency concerning teachers' non-nativeness and rural teaching context. Fieldwork took place in my home country, Costa Rica, at a university where I had previously worked. In this sense, I had a fluid insider/outsider researcher role. As an insider, I researched with other EFL teachers. As an outsider, some of the participants worked in communities and institutions I was not familiar with and had never visited before. Doing researching in one's own working context generated particular opportunities and challenges. The "insider" role was a powerful reflexive position that helped gain deeper engagement and insight into participants' understanding of professional agency experiences.

In contrast, while I shared, to a certain degree, the same teaching experience as the participants, we were also different on many levels due to our differences in context (community and institution). During the interviews, some participants recognised my insider identity and treated me as one of them by giving me implicit responses, assuming that I was capable of understanding their ideas. Yet, a lack of specific contextual administrative procedures and social characteristics, meant I had to ask for clarifications.

After each theme I found during the data analysis, I stepped back to reflect and stepped up to action. This action took the form of analysis of my assumptions, values and beliefs. I asked the questions: What do I think and feel about this theme? What influence might my thoughts and feelings have on this theme/finding? I finally re-evaluated my findings. As a final step I corroborated the narrative portraits and preliminary themes with my participants.

Reflection on Ethical Considerations: Subjectivity in Research

Life history research recognizes the interaction between the narrator and the listener. In this interaction, the narrator is a situated subject, and it comes clear that the object of analysis is the

subjective act wherein the subjects in a given situation interpret their lived life and their circumstances (Salling Olesen, 2017). In my role as a researcher, I took a listener position, listening and responding to the narrators' stories. Inevitably, in my listening activity, there were experiences that resonated with me and influenced my perceptions. I acknowledged the fact that I was not a blank slate and that there existed certain questions and motivations that led me to this research topic and thus informed the interaction between researcher and participants. In this way, the subjectivity of the researcher merges with the subjectivity of the participants. This interaction corresponded to the idea that the subjectivity of the researcher merges with the subjectivity of the participant (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Based on the premise that there is no neutral research, I acknowledged that there is a real world we interact with and that we create meaning in this world through interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); consequently, my epistemological and ontological assumptions were grounded in my view that life is shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic values. However, although my subjective experiences had to be taken into consideration, there were also those of the participants, which were most evident when their stories did not resonate with mine. I intended for role as inquirer to fuse with that of the participants into a single entity so that the findings were the creation of the process of interaction between us (Guba, 1990). My personal history was construed as both an asset and a liability, as I was not bias-free, in the research process. My solution was to make public my preconceived notions and to make it clear both that individuals are shaped by their lived experiences and that these experiences always come out in the knowledge I generated as a researcher and in the data generated by the participants.

Research with others "Like Me"

Quality and ethics in the data analysis process deserve special attention in any narrative research. Regarding ethics, situational and relational ethics stand out as key notions in this life history research. Situational ethics encapsulates the idea that research is a dynamic process that is shaped and reshaped in the course of its development (Downs, 2017). This type of ethics is clearly aligned with the notion of ethics as praxis as opposed to ethics as a fixed structure. As praxis, ethics demands that research take action toward and be in constant revision regarding the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing, or practicing ideas throughout the research process. Ethics is not restricted to a list of procedures that are outlined, considered, and addressed in a protocol during the beginning stages. Due to the fact that this research involved participants' experiences that were similar to my own, I also considered a relational ethics lens. This particular notion of ethics states that researchers require acting from their hearts and minds to acknowledge their interpersonal bonds to others so that conversations are initiated and maintained (Downs, 2017).

My interest in studying the professional agency of adult educators on regional campuses was rooted in my personal desire to seek for answers about my role as an adult educator myself. That is how I designated this research as "dear to my heart" (Downs, 2017), as I recognized there was something about my professional agency that was important to me and that I wanted to understand. In this journey, I explored resonances and dissonances in the participants' stories, and I wanted to speak to other language teachers who have shared some of the experiences and have not had the chance to reflect on them. I understand this close relationship with the topic brought ethical and quality issues that deserve discussion in this paper.

Quality in narrative designs is closely linked to the ideas of rigor, trustworthiness and generalizability. Rigor comprises the degree to which an analysis is systematic with regard to both the coverage of data and the application of analytical procedures (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). To attain rigor, this research analyzed all data without exception, it accounted for the sources of data and carried out a thematic analysis of findings. The transparency of the research process was assured by providing a description of its purpose, method, interpretation, and representation (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Regarding trustworthiness, I referred to the relationship between the findings of the narratives and the underlying realities they aimed to represent (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). To obtain a close representation of participants' lives, three levels of focus were considered: narrative as text, narrative as the subject's individual or psychological reality, and narrative as an account of the reality of life. Narrative as text relates to what events were like and how events occurred (reality of life). Narrative as the subject's reality includes how events were experienced by the participants (reality of the narrator) while narrative as account of reality relates to how events are narrated by the participants (reality of the text) (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). Finally, rather than establishing generalizable findings, this narrative inquiry provided much-needed understanding for adult educators and promotes empathetic values and present resonances for the analysis of similar cases.

Summary

This research focused on recognizing the influence of geographical and linguistic barriers within the experiences of adult educators by exploring how their backgrounds interacted with the construction of their professional agency. In the fields of education and language teaching and learning, narrative inquiry has proved worthwhile in the study of teachers' professional lives and careers. Indeed, this type of research is linked to the idea of understanding the inner mental worlds

of language teachers and learners and the nature of language teaching and learning as social and educational activity (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). Goodson and Numan (2002) agreed that life history research focused on teachers' lives could be potentially useful in elucidating an understanding of teachers' work lives. Representing and interpreting individuals' voices is not a simple task and needs to be done mindfully by addressing ethical concerns.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLORATION AND POINT OF REFERENCE

> *Life history research rests in the degree to which understandings of context play out in the search for understandings of individual and collective lives. Lives are never lived in vacuums. Lives are never lived in complete isolation from social contexts. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.22)*

In keeping with a narrative paradigm, this section brings my voice to the fore. In alignment with the principle that life history research is "a complex interaction between the lives of the researched and the researcher" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 103), in this section, I narrate my journey when describing and interpreting participants' portraits and contexts. On this same note, Cole and Knowles (2001) aspired that the researcher's presence is evident throughout the entire life history researching process. This presence infers a degree of self-consciousness and reflexive self-accounting. It is my intention, then, that my presence is felt in this account and that my fingerprint reveals the intersection of my life with those of my participants.

By using life history interviews, I had the opportunity to listen to adult educators' construction of their professional lives and their experiences while achieving professional agency. In seeking to locate their stories, I opened up a space for them to share their ongoing exercise of agency through a life course notion. An understanding of the role that context plays in these stories encouraged me to examine the communities and the institutions where these educators were located. Therefore, this section includes one portrait for each community, institution, and participant.

Narrative Portraits of the Communities and Institutions

Public universities in Costa Rica play a critical role in rural communities. The *Regionalization of Higher Education* policy calls for public universities to be pillars of economic development and growth in the communities where they are located. This, intentionally, builds connections

and relationships among higher education actors, structures, and systems within a region. To attain this goal, this policy assigns to higher education a more proactive role and agency in promoting sustainable economic growth and fair distribution of opportunities for all members of society (Schmidt-Fonseca, 2016). In the particular case of the university in this study, five different vulnerable rural communities have witnessed the active role of higher education over the last few decades. These communities are: Corredores, Sarapiquí, Liberia, Nicoya, and Pérez Zeledón. The portraits in this chapter include: overviews of general socioeconomic conditions, drawn from official government statistics and reports; personal descriptions of my experiences visiting each of the communities; and descriptions as provided by the participants.

Figure 1. Country Map with Communities.

The university where this study was conducted was founded in 1973. It started with a focus on teaching programs. Similar to other public universities in Costa Rica, this institution oversees regional campuses that are settled in rural vulnerable communities in different provinces. The portraits of the regional campuses offer general descriptions that highlight the programs offered, the number of students registered, and the current community programs.

Table 1
Organization of communities, institutions, and participants

Communities	Institutions	Participants
Corredores	Coto campus	María, Miguel, Freddie
Sarapiquí	Sarapiquí campus	David, Jaime
Liberia	Liberia campus	Rafael
Nicoya	Nicoya campus	Rosy
Pérez Zeledón	Pérez Zeledón campus	Andrés, Gary

Community: Corredores. This is a border town shared between Puntarenas province in Costa Rica and the Chiriquí province in Panama. This community is a flashpoint for social conflicts where security issues due to drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and smuggling of commercial products are common. Over 26% of residents in this community live in poverty, while the illiteracy rate is 4.4 %. The economy in this community is mainly based on palm oil and corn production (Estado de la Nación, 2018; INEC, 2011). It takes six hours to get to the capital city, San José, from Corredores, which makes access to services challenging and jeopardizes economic growth. Freddie, who is a participant from this community described its economic environment by noting:

> The main type of economic business or development we have in the area, you see it is rural, is palm oil only. So, they [the residents] have palm oil cultivations or farms full of palm oil trees. They live selling the products, and some other families grow rice. They don't see English as something that might benefit them in the future. It is a small place. And I'm not optimistic about the future.

During my research trip, I felt it was a long way from San José to this community. Fortunately, driving to this community was a delight to my eyes and soul. I enjoyed the variety of nature; the coastline, the forest, and the small waterfalls were a companion to me on the trip. The weather was brutally hot; I decided to cool down by locking myself in the car and turning on the air conditioning. Minutes before arriving, I saw the large palm plantations on both sides and two large rice processing facilities. Small businesses and houses scattered along the highway announced the community. The unpaved roads on both sides of the highway and the houses made me think of the town's vulnerability and slow rate of economic development.

Coto campus. The formal campus was founded in 2004. Before that, classes were held in various primary and high school classrooms scattered throughout the community. It currently hosts 526 students and offers undergraduate programs in Business Administration, Office Administration, English Teaching, and Systems Engineering and one graduate program in Business Administration. Community projects include areas of youth leadership, English learning, farming, and business development for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This campus's Foreign Languages Department oversees one program, the English Teaching Major (ETM). However, this department shares responsibility for the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses with other programs, including Engineering, Tourism, and Administration.

Participants María, Miguel, and Freddie work on this campus. They all graduated from the ETM on Pérez Zeledón campus, but they have different master's degrees from various public and private universities. They all shared their concerns about students' challenges on the Coto campus. Freddie described how vulnerable his students are by noting:

> Many students come from broken families. Some of them don't have the support of their parents. On this campus, in particular, I have noticed that we have many students who belong to the LGBT community. And since we live in a highly chauvinistic society, their parents reject them. So, they come here and see this place as a refuge. They are given scholarships, but the monetary help is not enough. I see the challenges they face.

On his part, Miguel also identified vulnerability issues on campus. He explained:

> I see a vulnerable population here that is the indigenous students that come from indigenous territories. They are at a disadvantage compared to the other ones. They receive a standard education, but they have limitations in the rural areas. They sometimes studied [in] high schools [that] do not have electricity or sometimes they don't have the proper conditions.

This campus was familiar to me as I had visited it five years ago. Still, I found many changes in the buildings during my research trip. When I entered the institution, a security guard welcomed me and requested information and my signature. I was suddenly embraced by an extremely hot wave and a long open corridor. As I walked through it, everything was accessible to my eyes. I saw students in open corridors chatting. Through big clear windows, I saw students and teachers in their classrooms. I saw a vast open green pasture surrounding the many corridors, and classrooms. And the clear, blue, sunny sky was above us, making its presence felt.

Community: Sarapiquí. This community covers most of the province of Heredia's total land area. This town is known for its rich biodiversity as well as for being an adventure seeker's dream destination. Over the past few years, Sarapiquí has gained popularity as a tourist getaway for families and thrill seekers alike. It is the closest community to San José in this study; it takes

one and a half hours to get there and the highway crosses Braulio Carrillo National Park, which is a green scenic landscape on the route to the Caribbean. Unfortunately, this community has the highest poverty rate (36.3%) and the highest illiteracy rate (5.6%) out of the five communities. One of the key challenges it faces is a high rate of educational exclusion. Other than tourism, agriculture and livestock represent important economic income. The most common products in the region are bananas, pineapples, and palm hearts (Estado de la Educación Costarricense, 2017; INEC, 2011). Jaime, who is one of the participants in the study, works at the Sarapiquí campus. He described his community by noting:

> This community is a developing county. It is one of the most beautiful places in our country. We are surrounded by mountains, national parks, biological reserves, protected areas. We offered a different type of tourism. We provide tourists with a relaxing experience. We don't want foreigners to be connected to technology. So, the idea of having a hotel in the middle of the jungle is to have a very relaxing time to be disconnected of the world, of technology, commuting, or travelling.

I visited this community for the first time as part of my research field trip. During this visit, even though the landscape was familiar, an unusual greener scenery embraced the road. Tall green trees covered the sky and provided a comforting shadow. Similar to the community of Corredores, small houses stood apart from each other. There were no buildings, only cattle, pastures, and a few people biking—no signs of a town. Suddenly, a central area with small businesses, a soccer field, a church, and a sign guided my way to campus.

Sarapiquí campus. Jaime and David are participants who have worked in this institution since its foundation. This campus is the newest one, founded in 2008, and has experienced significant growth since then. There are 460 students enrolled on this campus. Currently,

Business Administration is the only undergraduate program at this campus. However, it offers four associate programs, Integrated Farming Management, Tourism and Recreation, Computer Science, and Professional Secretary. Outreach on this campus covers the areas of gender issues, eco-farming and database management. David shared both challenges and virtues he has found in his community; he explained:

> More than 50% of our students come from extract 3. It means that they come from rural high schools, CINDEAS, distance education. Every year we receive 20 or 25 Indigenous students from all the country.… [T]his is difficult because they come from places which are the lowest in terms of social development. They come from telesecundarias and CINDEAs and the methodology is totally different…. I think we are blessed we have many resources… we have good things like the smartboards and projectors. They are in all classrooms. They have software to teach. They have the projector and the speakers, so you don't have to carry anything. We have AC.

The Foreign Languages Department on this campus does not run any programs; however, it has responsibility for the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses within the other programs offered.

This was my first time visiting this institution. The first day, a security guard approached me in the main entrance. He took my information and pointed at the only office building. Many students were waiting in line to complete their scholarship application forms. It seemed like a busy day. Some staff showed me the way to the faculty lounge. On my way, I noticed the extensive land all around the institution. I experienced an uncomfortable silence and quietness in the hallways. There were only two professors working in the lounge. Air conditioning made my wait pleasant.

Community: Nicoya. This community is located in the Nicoya Peninsula of Guanacaste province and is one of the country's most important tourist regions. Driving from San José to this community can take three hours all through flat plains. Added to this tourist income, oyster aquaculture has become an important economic activity. Even though tourism generates a significant revenue, the poverty rate now reaches 31.2%, which is near the highest of the communities in this study. The lack of risk-focused land-use planning has contributed to vulnerability and poor natural disaster management. Regarding education, the illiteracy rate is 2.9% with men showing a higher percentage than women. This gender gap is consistent throughout the country's population (Estado de la Nación, 2018; INEC, 2011). Rosy is the only participant from this community. She was not very optimistic about job opportunities in this place: "Here the only job opportunities are the [state] institutions: to work in the Ministry of Public Education, to work in the INS, for good jobs … the bank, and the hospital. That's it!"

During my research trip, I noticed that since this community is a hub for transportation to tourist places around it, it presented a very different landscape. There were many businesses, small and big. I witnessed local markets with traditional foods and many people coming and going in the summer heat. It was early morning when I arrived and drove to the interview, and the sun beat down with unrestrained brutality. The town was slightly shaded, with leafless trees scattered alongside the burning paved roads.

Nicoya campus. This institution was founded in 1973, the same year the main campus was founded. Currently, 1,011 students are registered for this school year (2019). Along with Liberia campus, this is the institution with the highest number of majors offered. It offers both undergraduate and graduate programs in Business Administration, Systems Engineering, Art and

Visual Communication, and Hydrology Engineering. Also, it offers undergraduate programs in Sustainable Tourism Management, Finance, Trade and Foreign Affairs, and English.

This campus's Foreign Languages Department teaches two language programs, both in English, a Teaching Major and an Associate Program in English. This department also teaches the ESP courses within other programs offered on this campus. In addition, this campus hosts two important research centres that oversee issues of sustainable development and Central American environmental initiatives.

During my visit, I was amazed by the unique architecture of this institution, a majestic rustic, two-floor hacienda-style building. To add to its splendor, the shade of giant leafy trees blocked the burning sun. After introducing myself to the security guard and driving to the designated parking space, I walked to the library to meet with the participant. Rosy described her passion for her campus in the following way:

> We colleagues have a very nice relationship. We are so close to each other. We share everything. We get along very well. Some of them were my students. The students on this campus come from the villages around and from the coast. They speak really good English because they have lots of people to practice, they have the input. They come from other parts of the country because of the scholarship and residence. The campus is getting better.

Community: Liberia. This community is located in the northwest of the Guanacaste province and has all the makings of a popular tourist spot: an international airport, an authentic colonial atmosphere, and a rich history. It is an eighty-minute trip from Nicoya and five-and-a-half hours from San José. Liberia is a town that people pass through on the way to surrounding cities and popular beaches. This community has the lowest poverty rate in the country, and its illiteracy rate is one of the lowest at 3.3%. Liberia's economy is based on livestock and the

production of sugar cane and rice. One positive aspect is that a significant proportion of the members of this community have benefitted from outreach, programs, and projects offered by higher education institutions (Estado de la Educación Costarricense, 2017; INEC, 2011).

During my research field trip, I noticed that, similar to Nicoya, tourists pass through this town on route to different places. I could see how the tourism boom in this region has influenced its development. Before my arrival, I saw small patches of forest and scattered trees. Though still rural because of the extensive pastures of coarse grasses where cattle graze, this community seemed busy. Once there, it looked like a bustling place full of businesses, chaotic transportation, and crowds in every corner. Rafael described his community as follows:

> It has a colourful scenario encompassing both, rural and urban-like style. The rural area has natural and traditional contexts together. On the other hand, there is a city and industrial environment that shapes the activities in this so-called "White City."

Liberia campus. This campus is in close proximity with Nicoya campus and shares similar historical records and some administration processes. It was established as an independent campus in 1998 and it has been growing through the years. This year the campus opened a new residence hall that is exclusively for students who come from remote communities. Also, the campus has built new sport facilities. This institution currently offers both undergraduate and graduate programs in Business Administration, Systems Engineering, Art and Visual Communication, and Hydrology Engineering. Also, it offers undergraduate programs in Sustainable Tourism Management, Finance, Trade and Foreign Affairs and English. Currently, 1,174 students are registered for the 2019 school year. The English language programs offered are an ETM and an Associate Program in English along with the ESP courses within the other

programs offered on the campus. Rafael, who is the only participant from this campus, shared his positive view of the campus:

> I think this institution will grow and will have more impact in the community. Every time we have meetings, they say "you have to impact the community, to be recognized by the community." So, we work like that and we, in the future, will get the results that we are planting now.

In my first visit to this campus, I could not help noticing the cattle farms surrounding this institution. A few small trees help to cool the building. As I scanned the building, silence hung in the air. There were no people, no students or staff, to speak with. I am sure summer break and school time are very different scenes. I let voices direct me, and while walking, I read the many signs, posters, and ads that revealed an active involvement of students.

Community: Pérez Zeledón. Even though this community is a very large town in the province of San José, its close proximity to the Southern region and far distance from the capital has meant it has faced challenges. The journey from San José takes about 3.5 hours through the impressive Cerro de la Muerte, which is the highest road in Central America. It boasts the lowest illiteracy rate of all communities at 2.9%. The main sources of income are fruit production, livestock, and tourism; however, the poverty rate is one of the highest in the country at 33.6%. Sadly, this community faces a high disaster-risk due to a lack of urban planning and construction (Estado de la Nación, 2018; INEC, 2011). Andrés and Gary are participants from this campus. When referring to the community, Gary said:

> We are in a tourist place; our community connects the South. People from the capital city coming here, they can still be in a rural area, but it has good goods and services….

> Rural tourism is very very trendy so they (tourists) can have many areas here to explore.

Once in the field while conducting interviews, I realized that, having grown up and lived there all my life, Pérez Zeledón was near to my heart. Once a rural town, prosperous development during the last decades has transformed it into an urban one. However, it is a meeting point and a significant source of services for neighboring rural communities.

Pérez Zeledón campus. This campus was founded in 1973 with a focus on teaching majors. Fortunately, the last decades have witnessed significant increases in the number of programs, students and outreach projects. In 2019, 1,055 students enrolled in the campus. It offers undergraduate and graduate programs in Business Administration and Systems Engineering; undergraduate programs in Office Administration, English Teaching, Physical Education, and Sustainable Tourism Management; as well as an Associate's Program in English. Efforts to support English learning are among the most significant community projects of this campus. The Foreign Languages Department teaches the ETM and a minor program along with the ESP courses offered in the other programs on campus.

In recognition of the need for outreach, this campus has undertaken initiatives in the areas of technologies, tourism administration, business, English language learning, and continuing education. Two major community projects are a Music School directed to kids and youth and a Language School that has promoted English learning.

During one of the interviews, Andrés shared a particular challenge he has identified:

> Many students who come to our university don't know what they wanna do and don't choose their major really. They didn't choose this because it is their first choice, they

> simply end up in this major because they couldn't go to the capital city or they couldn't go somewhere else to study.

I also know this campus well as I have been an educator there for 17 years. Due to heavy traffic, it took me longer than expected to arrive at this campus for my research visit. This institution welcomes visitors with an open square and wide stairways into the main building. Since my visit was in the last week of my trip, it was the first week of school on campus. It was a crowded building. The parking lot was full to its capacity. There were people in the hallways that obstructed my walking, long lines, and much noise. Next to the campus stands a forest, and its canopy provides incredible coverage and cooling effects.

Narrative Portraits of the Participants

Nine language instructors from the five regional campuses described above participated in interviews for this research project. The number of participants per campus varied: three from the Coto campus in Corredores, two from the Sarapiquí campus, one from each of the Nicoya and Liberia campuses, and two from the Pérez Zeledón campus. Despite the fact they have different stories, they all expressed admiration for the institution they worked for. They all shared that being a university teacher carries immense responsibilities, prestige, and demands for professional accountability. In their portraits, I share an overview of their childhood, early experiences as language learners, novice teaching memories, turning points in their teaching careers, professional agency, and future plans.

Table 2
The Participants

Pseudonym	Community	Campus and teaching load	Teaching experience in postsecondary rural education	Current positions on the regional campus
María	Corredores	Coto campus Part time	6 years	Language instructor
Miguel	Corredores	Coto campus Full time	6 years	Language instructor
Jaime	Sarapiquí	Sarapiquí campus Part time	10 years	Language instructor
David	Sarapiquí	Sarapiquí campus Full time	11 years	Language instructor, Administrative position
Rosy	Nicoya	Liberia campus Part-time	29 years	Language instructor
Rafael	Liberia	Liberia campus Full time	6 years	Language instructor
Andrés	Pérez Zeledón	Pérez Zeledón campus Full time	12 years	Language instructor, Administrative position
Gary	Pérez Zeledón	Pérez Zeledón campus Full time	15 years	Language instructor, Project developer
Freddie	Corredores	Coto campus Full time	8 years	Language instructor

María. Maria was the first participant to show interest in my research. I was intrigued by her fast reply. Then through her story, I realized how much it meant to her to take opportunities to learn about research and higher education. Her timing to meet was a perfect fit in my summer interview schedule. She offered to meet in her apartment, which I found a valuable opportunity. From our first interview, I learned that she was born in a rural town in Southern Costa Rica. She talked about how a formal education was a constant point of emphasis in her home while growing up, which made it easier for me to understand her devotion to her profession. Her mother showed that she expected her daughter to attend university. That is why, though she faced difficulties, she never quit. She shared:

> I started the English Teaching major in 2007 and the same day I told my mom "I don't want to continue" because the first day was so difficult.… I asked, "what am I doing here?" And I got a headache. I told my mom I don't know anything about English, and I don't want to come back.

Despite this traumatic first-day experience, she continued her specialization and got a master's degree in Second Languages and Culture on the main campus. From her teaching experiences with children, teenagers, and adults, she found an intense passion for adult education. She has been teaching on the Coto campus since 2013. She came into higher education teaching when she heard a regional campus required English language instructors. She submitted her curriculum vitae and after an interview, the institution hired her. What is impressive about her is the fact that she is commuting nine hours to get to the campus. She recently got married and moved to San José. Interesting to me was that, although living in the capital city offers more extensive job opportunities, she chooses to commute to respond to her passion, which seems to be situated within teaching in this particular institution. I could understand her decision by the way she described her teaching beliefs. She expressed:

> I worry about how the student feels in the environment. A safe environment where they can feel relaxed and then I start teaching. I cannot start teaching right away because then I don't connect with students. I focus on the emotional part first and then I start teaching.

She shared some of the significant decisions in her learning and teaching career that have contributed to her professional agency. Pursuing a master's degree did not come easily since she did not know the city or the institution, and she did not have a place to spend the night. She was moved by her professors' encouragement to get a specialization degree. Overcoming power

issues and geographical barriers on her regional campus has shaped the decisions she continued to make at both of the two public universities where she works. Although those two institutions are close to each other, they still demand constant commuting which has negatively influenced her professional development.

Her transformation as an adult educator is informed by the confidence to make decisions and mentor others that she has gained through her teaching experience. As she shared:

> I have seen change in confidence. At the beginning, I didn't see it clear. "Am I doing the right thing?" …at the beginning I felt like they (other colleagues) know more than me, so I wouldn't share anything. But now, I share everything I have.

María expressed a strong willingness for more significant professional development in her organization; however, because of the time constraints and lack of workshops offered, she has not been provided with valuable opportunities. Nevertheless, for her future, she plans to insist on and search for those resources in her desire to best serve her student population.

Miguel. Miguel was born and raised in a rural community. Even though neither of his parents completed high school, he shared that they always encouraged him to value formal education. In his narratives, he expressed that he cherished the way his parents shaped his strong commitment to be an honest person. Despite the fact that all his education was in public institutions with no intense approach to studying the English language, Miguel shared that his father emphasized the importance of learning English. That was why his parents paid for a private basic course in his high school years. Studying English was not a life dream. However, he took advantage of the opportunities available on one of the regional campuses of the university where, years later, he taught for two years. He described his experience when entering university:

> When I was about to graduate (from high school), I didn't know what to study.… I applied to pharmacy in the University of Costa Rica, [but] I didn't get the grade for admission…. It [English Teaching] wasn't my first option. But then I just fell in love. It was a matter of discovering what I wanted to do. I discovered I wanted to be a teacher. I fell in love with the language as well.

In his years as a language learner on a regional campus, he found a true passion for language and enjoyed learning pronunciation and grammar. It was through the tutoring opportunities in his last year of the major and the Teaching Practicum course that he said he found himself as a teacher. He has taught on Pérez Zeledón and Coto campuses, but got a full-time job at campus A five years ago. He shared that he is aware that it was through his hard work as a learner that he gained the attention of faculty on the campus and got hired. In his narratives, he said that his current practice does not come without challenges; however, his confidence has given him a key role in the language program he has been teaching in. In his words, "the major that I am teaching, which is English Teaching, I have been giving courses in pedagogy, oral expression, integrated skills, culture…. I think I have taught about 20 different courses already".

Through the roles he has played in his career, he now finds that because of the experience and knowledge he gets everyday he is becoming more committed to being a mentor and a leader. To be a good mentor he thinks he needs to improve every year and every semester as people will not expect less from what he has been giving.

It seemed to me that commuting decisions shape his professional agency as he first moved to a faraway regional campus to teach; one that is three hours away from home and that faces more challenges. Added to this decision, this year he decided to start a new master's program on the main campus. This represents a seven-hour one-way ride that turns into 14 hours commuting

every weekend. This master's program offers him the specialization he has been interested in for some years. He explained that though research is expected of professors in his institution, not many undertake this endeavor. However, despite the fact he was afraid at the beginning, he has found in research a great opportunity to grow and advocate for the institution and students. And his efforts to promote research in his students have proved to be fruitful.

In his case, transformation is informed by the humanistic philosophy and tolerance promoted in the university. He recognized that his stances were clear since the very beginning, but now he identifies himself as a more humanistic professor; both he and his pedagogy have transformed. He emphasized, "I have students who are Christians, atheists, gay, who smoke marijuana. Even though I don't agree with some of the views they have, I respect them ... I don't have to make them feel that they are judged."

During our conversation, he shared his plans for the future. He expressed a strong willingness for greater professional involvement in his institution and thought he has much more to contribute as a professional by having his own outreach project for the community and completing a PhD program in the near future.

Jaime. Jaime grew up in a rural community. The Catholic beliefs and values he learned at home have influenced his role in society, as he feels he should support others and be a listener for the people around him. Jaime shared that he did not really plan to become a teacher. However, problems with family finances and the lack of opportunities for further education in the area he grew up prompted him to attend the only university in his community rather than a university in San José where there were more options. Jaime embraced the opportunity to learn English and obtained a university degree at the same time. Unfortunately, as he was completing the ETM, he realized some program weaknesses. He openly expressed:

> I would have liked to have a more natural English environment, which I didn't have when I was taking my bachelor's degree. This was a pilot program ... It was still a project. I took many courses in Spanish so that is why I have a lack in my (language) learning.

Despite this, Jaime said he values the job opportunities offered to him. He moved to another province as he was granted tenure at a primary school. Later, Sarapiquí campus offered him a part-time position as a language instructor. But nothing seems to have influenced him as much as his position as a visiting professor in an American college in an international foundation program. He was there for one complete school year and then came back to Costa Rica. During his 15 years of teaching experience, he has worked as a language instructor at three different institutions quite different from each other: a primary school, a high school, and a university. However, Jaime admitted the university setting has opened many more opportunities: "I belonged to this campus. It marked the path which I walk through. It opened a door to me to have a better lifestyle, position, stable job. It helped me to be more open-minded."

It is through his active involvement in the community, perhaps because of his multiple teaching roles, that he is aware of the challenges of this developing and vulnerable county. The needs of students are intertwined with those of the community in his belief that providing more language learning opportunities for students contributes to the demands of the economy: "We are changing our curriculum in that major (Tourism). We are trying to teach them more English courses because we want them to graduate with an intermediate or high English level." Emigration of graduated students to San José is also a concern for him, as he noted, "we as an institution hope to provide professionals for our region.… I would like them (graduated students) to stay in the region to create and design projects to help our community grow to help others to

get opportunities." He expressed that his classes are shaped by a focus on the students and a sincere ideal to be a friend. He, however, is aware that setting limits between his role as a teacher and his role as a friend is necessary to create a safe space for him and his students.

In describing his professional agency, Jaime mentioned how his key decisions revolve around his determination to never stop studying. His professional development includes two masters degree, constant participation in conferences, and an emerging researcher role as he has published some papers. He feels he has influenced his students and family by being a role model. For him, this is particularly evident in the emotional comments he has received from family and students.

He prefers to keep a neutral stance when making decisions in the institution and places trust in other faculty members in this matter. Jaime shared that he had transformed through life as he has become wiser when making decisions and his teaching experience has boosted his self-confidence. Jaime has big dreams for his future, all of them linked to his affiliation with the regional campus. He would like to continue working in this institution for many years; he would also like to be granted tenure and move up in the institutional academic hierarchy in order to become full professor at some point. These future plans explain his current decisions, involvement, and risks taken.

David. We met on Sarapiquí campus for the interviews. Both of our interviews were on busy days for him, which made me think about his active involvement in the institution. David is originally from the community in which he currently teaches. He expressed that his spiritual beliefs and mother have been a compass ever since he was young and his father has been an example of hard work. He completed his primary and secondary education in public institutions in his hometown. He started university at 17, but he found he was not ready to make a career

decision. Before studying English formally, he tried Agronomy and Computer Science. It was in the Computer Science major that he started taking English classes in a prestigious institute in San José. Once there, he found a true passion for this discipline, "that was the place where I realized that I like English." Then, few years later the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) hired him to teach in a high school.

His decision to pursue an ETM did not come easy. He married at a young age and had a daughter soon after. He travelled to San José on weekends to take classes while teaching during the week. He cherishes his years as a learner and treasures the positive academic influence of good professors. Later, he graduated from a master's program in English Teaching, for which he commuted to the capital city every weekend for two years. He divides his time teaching children and adults. He mentioned significant projects he has developed and how hard work has paid him with recognition and a good reputation. He started teaching on this campus since it was founded in 2008. It is due to his experience and dedication that he now holds an administrative position in the Languages Department. David shared his initiative to make English learning more significant to students by making changes to the curriculum, informed by his first-hand experience with the language in the United States. He is aware that most of his students will not have similar language and culture experiences.

It seems to me that his professional agency is informed by his close relationship with and commitment to his hometown. His strong roots and multiple teaching roles in different institutions in the community influenced his decisions to stay and belong to the campus. This is how he explained the most important decisions in his career: "I think that the first one (decision) is decided to stay here. To be full-time working through the years.… I attended conferences, I made new friends in other campuses and abroad. It was a great decision." It is through his

example and encouragement of formal education that he has found ways to influence his wife, daughters, brother, and colleagues. One of the most significant decisions that showed his commitment to his community was his choice to decline a high-ranking position with the MPE because it required him to move to another rural community in a different province. Even though this position meant more prestige and salary, he was not willing to stop working for his hometown. He explained,

> At first, it sounded like a good plan. I liked it, but then I started thinking about my campus and that if I decided to move to this new place, I wouldn't have the chance to work here anymore. So, I decided to stay here. It is the place I want to finish my career.

David openly shared that his experience has given him confidence to take much stronger stances. He sees this as transformation. However, experience and a long, close relationship with colleagues comes with challenges as he admits that to separate feelings from work is complicated. He has adopted a hardline stance against any priority other than students on campus and the community. He has clear plans for his future. He shared that he sees himself completing a doctoral program and participating in a faculty-exchange program in an English-speaking country.

Rosy. I was very excited when I read Rosy's email showing interest in my study. She is the only participant from the Nicoya campus who contacted me. Having her story allowed me to represent her community and institution, which otherwise would not have been captured. Rosy is the participant with the most years of teaching experience on this campus. She is excited about her future retirement in 2020. Like all the other participants, Rosy was born and raised in the community where she is teaching. She has fond memories of her school years. She mentioned that her mother played a key role in her early formal education as she was a primary school

teacher. She shared that when it was time for her to start university, she was interested in a major other than English. However, she did not get the required admission average mark, so she had to look for other possibilities. Prior to enrolling in the English Major, she took a basic English class that directed her somehow because of the positive experience she had.

After taking this course, she enrolled in an English Major in San José, however, she did not finish the program, and instead she met her future husband and focused on her family. She had a daughter soon after and decided to move back to her town to get her parents' support. Once settled in her town, the MPE was piloting a program to reinforce English language teaching. Rosy saw a great opportunity for her family and for her. Soon after, she enrolled in an ETM in a distance-education program. Years later, she was contacted by the university to teach some classes. Even though her major was in elementary education, her linguistic skills and teaching experience were transferable to teach on this campus. From that moment on, she has divided her job between two public education organizations. She developed a strong passion for teaching both children and adults and she openly expressed how much she loves what she does: "My philosophy of teaching is love. I do know that there is second language acquisition, task-based and cooperative learning, communicative approaches, and many very interesting and important things. But if we don't do it with love, it doesn't work."

She has witnessed the success of her students as some of them currently have important teaching positions. Rosy shared stories of her close relationship with colleagues and how they have developed a strong bond. But her influence does not end there. Writing, designing, and actually executing an outreach project to teach English to adults in vulnerable communities was not only a boost to her career but also a rewarding experience. This project she co-developed was

focused on teaching adults in the community, and it was the starting point of a series of other similar projects that made the campus uniquely positioned nationwide.

After all her years as a language instructor and adult educator, Rosy is clear about the way she has transformed through time. She sees herself as a more organized person since she learned to manage multiple roles. She also feels more confident with her linguistic skills as she has found she is able to express herself in different ways. She mentioned that she has found that she takes advantage of her previous knowledge and experience with the project in her everyday teaching. Even though there is a generation gap between her and her current students, she is aware of the importance of connecting with students and finding ways to make learning meaningful.

Unfortunately, not all her experiences have been positive. She shared that last year she faced a discouraging event when a group of students and faculty did not treat her as respectfully as she would have expected. A misunderstood communication caused a series of events where she felt she was put on the spot unfairly and she felt mistreated. In spite of this problem, she is optimistic about her retirement next year. Still, she has many plans that actively involve her in language teaching. And she foresees a great future for her community, noting, “I see more students studying … more students thinking about the university as an opportunity, as an alternative, and I see more students involved.”

Rafael. We met in two different libraries. Our first interview took place at Liberia campus, where he works, and the second interview was in the public library in his town. Rafael grew up in a border town far away from the metropolis. He mentioned that his abiding memories of his early years are the tight bond with his parents and brothers and his mother’s influence on his education. When he shared stories about his early years as a language learner, he recognized the basis for his particular passion for English, noting, “This passion comes from home. It was like a

hobby. My parents said, 'English is nice why don't you learn it.' And they brought some books and videos and encyclopedias.…We learned how to love English."

That is how he explained the way this passion led him to make a drastic decision after his first year enrolled in the Electrical Engineering Major. His decision to initially enroll in this major was informed by the high value his parents placed on engineering careers. However, after experimenting with what he thought was a good choice for one year, he decided to quit and shifted to an English Major. While learning English, he traveled to the United States and participated in an exchange program that widened his view about how much he still needed to learn. He later moved to San José in pursuit of a master's degree, however, he decided to come back to his town and look for opportunities there without completing the program.

He shared that he has the sense that his teaching job is not stable. That is the reason why he is open to new possibilities and is extending his horizons by studying Science Teaching; he foresees that in the future he could teach this subject in English. When sharing his novice teacher stories, he mentioned that most of his motivation to be a good teacher comes from his experience teaching adults in high at-risk border communities. He shared:

> I really learned how to appreciate what I have because they [adult learners] were in a very difficult and disadvantageous situation, so that was very dramatic for me in the sense that I had to do my best and tried to continue learning to be better and be a better teacher for them because they needed it.

Even though he did not explicitly express it, his daughter's birth seems to have been a turning point in his life that has made him be more mindful when making decisions; as he shared, "All my decisions involve my daughter." Overall, difficulties and experience have also shaped the way he makes decisions, "It has been challenging …it has been sometimes stressful because you

feel you are not in the correct path or doing the right thing, but at the end you stop thinking and start doing." He shared that he tries to influence others through his optimistic personality and his life stories:

> I am an optimistic person, so I tried to influence others in general. With my students I sometimes tell part of my challenges in order for them to be motivated. I think that I have influenced them in that sense I tried to inspire them or make them feel inspired of the work they do because what they do is great.

Most of all, he described his agency as being informed by his biggest decision in life: to never give up, despite any difficulties. He is determined to persist, to do his best, to not step back, and to do whatever it takes to get what he wants. He also shared that sometimes his workplace is surrounded by negative discourses that put educators under pressure not to give their best or just be mediocre. However, his stance is to ignore those comments. Instead, he identifies higher education teaching as an opportunity to work purposefully: "When I go to university, I feel like I own it like really do what I can do, what I know, give my best and get the results that I expect."

His future plans include active involvement with his community's history. He is working with a group of young people recording historical and archeological accounts of his hometown. His expectation is to take the project a step forward and help with translation of the information. He is really optimistic about the future of the community and the campus. He thinks they both will grow together, and the institution will be of high value to the community. His view of education is not limited to the classroom, instead, he sees it as an overarching process: "Some people see it [teaching] as a job and we cannot see education as a job, it is a lot bigger than that."

Andrés. Andrés has worked on the Pérez Zeledón campus for 12 years. When talking about his childhood memories, he shared that he was raised Christian, non-Catholic, which was a little

uncommon in the 1980s for a Costa Rican family. While he was growing up, his parents played an influential role, as he identified them as God's voice, the representatives of God on Earth. He shared that he grew up with an idea of a very caring, tender, loving God and family. Andrés shared that formal education has always been important for him and his family. Indeed, he witnessed his parents' pursuit of degrees later in life in their desire to professionalize their careers. He shared that when he was young, he realized there was an underlying belief that he should study and become a professional too. He identified English to be present early in his life when a neighbor offered classes and he was the only one showing genuine interest in learning. He also has fond memories of his early contact with English when helping others around him.

> When I was 9 or 10 my mom went to high school and she would back home from school, and I would get her books and started to read and study English with her simply because I liked it…. I did find languages were always very easy to me, especially English, what I used to do when I was in high school is that I would help my classmates a lot.

Andrés' educational background includes a bachelor's degree in English, a master's degree in English Literature, and a master's degree in Leadership and Educational Management from two different public universities in Costa Rica. English Teaching was not a clear goal when he started university. In fact, during his first semester he enrolled in Architecture. Later, he experienced a disjunctural moment when he started realizing that he was spending more time in the English Department as he enjoyed reading books. It was during his master's program in English Literature that he started to realize that there was not much of a choice for him in Costa Rica but to become a language teacher. Once he came to this realization, he started looking for teaching opportunities. He has been a language instructor on the same regional campus for 12 years. He

values the impact of his teaching on his students and reflected on his rapport with students, his passion for literature, and his role as a servant to the community.

He mentioned that the biggest obstacle he had overcome once he decided to teach in higher education was his inexperience and lack of training in teaching broadly and language teaching specifically. Being aware of this challenge, he decided to focus on his students. He felt at a disadvantage as he was surrounded by certified language instructors, however, his success as a professor is rooted in the way he involves his students in classroom decisions, as he said, "I really try to get this insight of what they need, what they are getting from what I am saying. I remember focusing a lot on that and trying to be a helper more than a teacher because I didn't consider myself a teacher." Through his experience he found that the approach he used has made him to be a respected professor in the institution. His rapport with students and his passion and knowledge for English literature has positioned him as an approachable educator.

Andrés's decisions and engagement with this campus speak for his active agency. He currently holds an administrative position which is offered to professors who not only have the management and organizational skills but who also are willing and ready to take on new duties. He started this new role a year ago. However, years before, he coordinated an important outreach program that provided him with crucial administration skills related to his current position. Because many potential opportunities on campus lie ahead, Andrés does not have a set plan for the near future. Deciding between continuing with the administrative position he has now or coming back to full-time teaching seems a hard decision. However, he knows teaching is what he likes doing.

Gary. Gary grew up in the same community she is teaching in. She has been working on the Pérez Zeledón campus for 12 years. During the first minutes of our interview, she shared her

early life memories in a small rural school and remembered that transitioning to high school was hard as she felt sometimes marginalized because of her economic status. Fortunately, she mentioned she gained her classmates and teachers' respect because of her good grades and intelligence. After high school, Gary wanted to pursue a major in Industrial Production Engineering, however, her parents could not afford for her move to San José. Instead, she looked for opportunities in what she considered a prestigious university in her town, which is the same institution she is currently working at. Since English was her favorite subject in high school, she saw in the ETM a good opportunity. She remembered she had an early start in her high school days when she tutored her classmates and they insisted she would become a great language instructor.

After completing her teaching major, she enrolled in a licentiate's program on the main campus. Her formal education was her priority and she made job decisions based on her opportunity to complete this program. Soon, she was offered a tenure position with the MPE, which she accepted, while also continuing with a master's program in Second Languages and Cultures on the main campus. Getting these two graduate degrees forced her to commute four hours every weekend to and from San José. However, she shared that she valued this decision because of the deep bond she developed with classmates who became her colleagues. These colleagues represented a strong network that shaped her early teaching years and taught her on the value of teamwork and generosity. Once enrolled in the master's program, she was invited to teach on the regional campus where she has now been teaching for 15 years. and although she found a more hostile environment among teachers at this institution, since other instructors did not share ideas or material, she nonetheless managed to have an active role.

Gary shared that during the last several years she has divided her teaching between two different institutions: a primary school and a university. She described her responsibilities in the university as being far more rewarding in comparison to her work in the primary school. At the university, she has been teaching in different language programs, such as the ETM, ESP in different majors, and the English Minor. This last one is the one she enjoys the most as she finds students are more engaged. Her commitment to students is not limited to language instruction, in fact, she shared that she has placed a lot emphasis on guiding students to become good professionals:

> I really want to see the progress linguistically speaking, also in terms of responsibility because at the university we not only teach language, we teach students how to become professionals, how to respond to the demands of their profession and career.

Her professional agency is rooted in her 15 years of teaching experience; her wide repertoire of events has given her a stronger voice in her roles as a project developer and a language instructor. She has approached her head of department to share her disagreement in regard to the courses she is assigned. She shared that those courses downplay her skills and knowledge as they are easy courses. She feels that more challenging courses will boost her career. Much of her influence in her workplace has been indirect. Even though she does not identify herself as a leader, her role as developer in the most important outreach project on the campus has had greater impact in following projects.

Her present decisions are informed by her plans for the future. In the face of existing constraints and limitations to her progressing in her teaching career in the MPE, she decided to work only at the university during the first semester of the 2019 school year. This decision implies more time to devote to research and to plan the new stage of her project. After

postponing her career growth because she wanted to prioritize her new role as a mother, she now feels ready to have a more active role.

Freddie. Freddie was the last participant to respond to my request to interview adult educators working on regional campuses. He has been teaching on the Coto campus for eight years. We met in the small library on his campus. When Freddie shared stories about his early years, he recognized his parents' influence on his view of formal education. Both parents were teachers themselves. He grew up witnessing their busy lives. His father was clear about the limited options Freddie had if he failed school; it was school or "coyolear" (a very low-paid farming practice in the region). Soon in life, he knew farming was not his dream, even though his father was an agronomist and showed great passion for this field. Freddie is familiar with rural communities. He has lived all his life in the same region.

When he entered university, he did not move to San José as it was far from his home, instead, he enrolled at the Pérez Zeledón campus, which is in between two places. He wanted to major in Business Administration, however, what the university offered after his admission test was a major in English Language Teaching. He decided to give it a try and he appreciated the advice and support of his older and only sister. He reflected on how she was a guide during those early years, "Probably if she hadn't been there, I wouldn't have studied anything. Probably, I would be doing something that is not as meaningful as what I am doing now."

He remembered that during his first year in this major he was not a mature student. Fortunately, he found some direction and was able to manage the demanding schedule and load of public higher education. After graduating, he started teaching for the MPE in his hometown in some temporary positions. Then, he decided to take his curriculum vitae to the headquarters in hopes of getting a long-time job. Days before he handed his curriculum vitae in, he got a call

from the English Advisor offering the possibility to work for a public university in his community as she had heard they needed qualified language instructors. More than a decision, it was a challenge he was willing to take on. He understands that working at the university level demands a lot from instructors: "[Y]ou need to believe you're a university professor. You cannot teach the same way you do it at a high school level. So, you need to prepare yourself a lot." It is this understanding that shapes the way he sees himself as a lifelong learner: "[S]ince I am a professor; I need to prove myself always. Every year I need to learn something different."

Recognizing how lifelong learning and the credentials behind it impact his career, Freddie then went back to Pérez Zeledón campus to complete a graduate program in Applied Linguistics. Later, he completed a master's degree in Education at a private university in his town and started a master's program in Second Languages and Culture on the main campus. He did not finish that master's program back then, and nonetheless, he resumed this year, now with an emphasis on ESP.

According to Freddie, he feels conflicted about re-establishing himself as a learner in his new role in the master's program and having to commute seven hours to the main campus. He knows this decision has a significant positive impact on his work as an adult education practitioner and on his future at the institution, however, he knows this decision comes with a lot of sacrifice. It is probably his self-identification as a learner that makes this step easier,

> I think that the role I feel more identified with is the role of student. Even though now I am a professor, I think that it has been very difficult to me. I am still a student. I always want to learn something new.

The experience he has gained through the years teaching in the same institution has made him transform the way he sees his job. He finds himself to be a more mindful professor: "I think I am

a better professional. Now, I plan my classes more carefully and I consider more my students, their needs and learning styles, what interests them." Now, he also has a clear plan to follow, which is to get a stable job. He mentioned he is open to possibilities and is not afraid of accepting any teaching position in any institution that offers him tenure. He sees himself in academia doing what, he has found, he loves to be doing.

Summary

By first providing the context of the adult educators in this study, these community and institutional portraits do more than reveal physical space; they convey a closer look into the participants' experiences in achieving professional agency throughout their teaching career lives. With the same purpose, the participants' narratives were captured through one-to-one interview conversations, during which we discussed how their careers moved in space and time. Participants shared their interpretations of their past, present, and future and brought forth an abundance of stories that provide a living picture of their experiences for this life history research.

CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES

> A single life story stands alone … but several life stories taken from the same set of socio-structural relations support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of knowledge.
> (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p.76)

Drawing on life history narrative's possibilities of representation proposed by Cole and Knowles (2001) which suggest that meaning is shaped by the form in which it appears. In this section, I present findings for meaning rather than to record results and findings. The representational form and structure in this section acknowledge the complex and messy nature of participants' unfolded stories. An alternative frame of portrayal emerged through participants' lives in context that do not follow a linear research-questions-and-answers format. Rather, in my attempt to find more authentic and meaningful representations of the experiences recounted by the participants, the themes embedded in those experiences and the process of telling them, I used a particular temporal representation. Guided by Priestley, Robinson, and Biesta's (2015) ecological view of teacher agency, themes are organized temporally, in relation to either habitual aspects of the past, present contingencies, and future orientations and are subdivided into subthemes. This process captured a holistic dimension of participants' accounts which was influenced by the interconnected elements of their life histories.

Informed by the temporal dimension offered by life history research and the life-course notion driving this study, this section describes the four large themes related to professional agency that emerged from discussions with my participants. The ecological approach to the understanding of agency acknowledged the interplay between educators' individual characteristics, their surroundings, and the emergence and transformation of their engagement inherent in participants' life histories.

It is not possible to understand educators' exercise of agency by looking only at their present. That is why in this chapter I link information from the research data into themes in order to more closely analyze the research questions using the triad of elements consisting of the iterational (past), the practical-evaluative (present), and the projective (future imaginings). I made this connection in order to make possible an understanding of the participants' particular experiences of their engagement with events throughout their language teaching and learning careers. Data were organized through chronological guiding areas that were mapped out in the interviews. Data from interviews were compiled individually. Then, stories in the interviews were coded with three coding processes: open coding, narrative coding, and pattern coding. For open and narrative coding, the use of gerunds allowed for the analysis of actions and, at the same time, opened up a space for active and critical analysis of the data.

Upon completion of the collection of codes, information was then sorted into emerging themes that described personal journeys in the participants' exercise of professional agency. These emerging themes were further analyzed in relation to supplementary documents and the reflections in my research journal. Next, following pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016), the categorized information resulted in eight major theme descriptions. In the final corroboration interview with participants, they then answered follow-up questions and shared their ideas about my thematic interpretation of the data. Finally, the data were represented in the following themes: rural and institutional belonging, becoming an English language teacher, classroom agency and institutional structure, beliefs and the affective factors behind non-nativeness, the role of relationships when achieving agency, commitment to the cause, the call for academic professional development, and empowering language learners and the community through projects.

Even though the stories of the participants took place in five campuses in different parts of the country, I could not identify remarkable distinctions of experiences attributable to a particular campus. I intentionally presented a portrait for each campus and community in my interest to confirm each participant's social location and context. Instead of providing separate representations, the participants' perceptions of their non-nativeness and contextual factors to exercise professional agency are situated in the broader frame of public universities in rural Costa Rica. In this section, I offer a general thematic analysis to share findings. In addition, after organizing the themes temporally, I address certain sub-topics within each research question to determine how both participants' experiences as non-native English speakers and the rural context of their lives inform their exercise of professional agency. Broadly, the significant themes that have resulted from the data revolve around a strong sense of belonging to the rural community and the institution, to both of which participants demonstrated deep commitment. Participants discussed how their commitment to their profession, students, and institutions have guided them to adopt a variety of roles in their profession, claim social recognition and association, identify the importance of relationships, and make decisions to provide a promising future.

Honouring the Past: Agency in Retrospect

There are elements of educators' current professional agency that are rooted in past experiences; the more experiences, the broader the repertoire of responses to engage and act. These past elements mainly included participants' rural and institutional belonging and how non-native English-learning experiences inform their teaching practices.

Rural and institutional belonging. All of the participants were born in rural communities; most of them were born, raised, and educated in the same community they are teaching in.

Growing up in rural communities meant that participants faced limited school and job opportunities; however, participants' call for formal education was informed by their parents' beliefs that education would make a difference in their lives. Either through an explicit discourse or modeled through example, participants were guided earlier in their lives to attend university.

Andrés alluded to the implicit valuing of formal learning in his home, stating: "It was understood and it was an underlying belief that I was to study. I was going to go to school. And later on, it became really clear that I was going to become a professional." David shared his father's hope that he and his brother would study. It was important to his father that he and his brother become better than him and that education was the path to take. For his part, both of Freddie's parents were professors and he grew up a witness to their tight schedules and busy lives. Gary's story went beyond her parents and involved her grandparents. She recalled:

> My grandparents always wanted my uncles and aunts to study…. They [my parents] were talking to me like not pushing me to go to university, but I was following I don't know who or what. I just knew that I have to go to school.

In contrast, María's mother explicitly advised her in this regard, by saying to her, "you have to study." Miguel recognized that his parents did place a lot of value on a formal education, while Rafael remembered the influence of his mother, noting that "she always loved studying because it was an opportunity to grow up in life, to be somebody. Studies are really important in my family because it is a bridge to achieve things."

At different times during our conversations, the participants expressed a strong sense of belonging to the rural community in which they work. This sense of belonging was shown in crucial decisions they made. María, for example, got married two years earlier and at the time of our interview had moved to the capital city, San José. However, she decided to commute nine

hours every week to get to the campus where she teaches because there she has found a true passion. Miguel also lived in a different community, but he decided to commute four hours to work on his campus. David made a drastic decision when he declined a highly paid and socially recognized position with the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) because it required him to move to another town and quit working in the community where he has always lived. These decisions speak to participants' active efforts to make choices and intentional action to be part, stay and have an active role in their communities.

Along with important decisions, belonging is linked to feelings of empathy toward the community. In the case of Andrés, he expressed his empathy as follows: "Teaching in the same town where I was born and where I grew up definitely influence the way I teach because I can understand what most of these kids come from. I belong to the same social class." Rafael has lived all his life in the same border town. Growing up in the same community in which he now teaches has given him a broad understanding of the social challenges that locals face, mainly violence and limited education opportunities.

Participants shared a similar sense of belonging to the regional campuses where they currently work. Most of them have studied at the same institution, which gives them a greater emotional attachment. In their stories, they shared deep gratitude for the opportunities that the institution has provided for them to grow. Jaime said, "I belonged to this university. It marked the path which I have walked through. It opened a door to me to have a better lifestyle, position, stable job. It helped me to be more open-minded." Freddie completed his undergraduate and licentiate's program, and is now completing a master's degree, in the same institution as he now works. He described his gratitude towards the institution as follows: "I think if I were working on a

different place, I wouldn't have the opportunity to share my experiences with my students. I wouldn't have the chance to study or to know a different culture."

Miguel has completed all of his degrees at the same institution, but at different campuses. He expressed his deep feelings by noting: "I love this university. I studied my bachelor's program, my licentiate's program there and about to study the master's there." Rosy, who has the most teaching experience (19 years) on her campus, explained the emotional attachment she feels: "This university is something I would defend and fight anywhere because I know that we work hard, and that the public university is the answer for every single student."

Study participants recognized higher education as an essential and valuable part of personal growth, which aligns well with the purposes of rural higher education in Costa Rica. There, education is a key social and economic driver; it is seen as the basis for justice, competitiveness, equity, and quality to forge conditions and opportunities for better well-being, contributing to the reduction of poverty and marginalization (Opertti, 2008; Schmidt-Fonseca, 2016). From some of the comments made by these rural educators, it seems as though strong feelings of attachment to the community and institution encouraged them to stay and take an active role. In doing so, these educators were constructing their individual sense of identity and collective consciousness through their identification with place and strengthening their values, norms, and social practices (Bourdieu, 1986).

Becoming an English language teacher. Only one of the research participants, David, chose teaching as a career or profession, driven by his interest or passion. The rest of the participants fell into the profession due to limited school or job opportunities. Andrés was the only participant who completed his undergraduate program in the capital city. He completed a degree in English and a master's degree in English Literature. Before completing his master's program,

he realized he did not have many job opportunities other than starting a teaching career. Rafael experienced a similar situation. He completed an undergraduate program in English in a neighboring town; however, he decided to accept a teaching position in order to get a job. He later completed a licentiate's and master's degree in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching.

The rest of the participants chose the English Teaching Major (ETM) from a short list of programs provided by the campus near home. In fact, Freddie wanted to pursue a major in Business Administration, Miguel was interested in Microbiology, Gary in Industrial Design, Jaime in Ecotourism, and Rosy in Tourism. María did not know what she wanted to study; she just knew she did not want to be a teacher; she did, however, want to learn a foreign language.

The value of taking risks and choosing a major they did not want transformed into an opportunity to find their passion for their profession. Even though most of them never aspired to be an adult educator and this career path was not on their radar, they all shared in a contentment with their work on campus. Rafael, Rosy, Jaime, David, and María supplemented their workloads on campus by teaching with the MPE as well. It was with the MPE that they experienced dissonance, and consequently they all aspired to more stable positions on campus and quit working for the MPE.

In reflecting on their decisions to complete an ETM, some participants shared their early-in-life awareness and sensitivity toward language learning. English was recognized by Miguel's father as a driver of social change and economic demand in the country, just as technology is. That made Miguel take a basic English course during his high school years. Meanwhile Gary, Andrés, and María demonstrated their aptitude for language learning earlier in their childhood and teenage years. Andrés remembered his experience in the following way: "I did fine [in high

school], but languages were always very easy to me, especially English." Gary told me that English was one of her favorite subjects in high school. She remembered her classmates telling her she would become an English language instructor because of her ability to explain difficult concepts. María recalled that English was an easy subject for her in high school too and that her aptitude for language was noted by her classmates. Rafael discussed the way his parents influenced his and his brother's interest in English learning when they were kids by presenting it as a hobby and providing them with books, videos, and encyclopedias.

One characteristic all participants had in common is that they all learned English after their teen years in a formal setting in Costa Rica. None of them acquired nor learned the language in an English-speaking country. They all identified certain barriers in learning in this way, but they agreed that their previous experiences as EFL language learners provided them with the ability to empathize with their students' learning experiences. As Andrés said, the phrase "Been there, done that!" has informed his language teaching practices. He explained:

> When a student makes a mistake, he or she is funny and it is weird, but been there, done that. It is like I have gone through the same process you have gone through. I always tell my students I have been there. So, it helps with identifying and empathizing with them.

In the following quotation, Miguel described a similar thought to Andrés:

> My students are NNES as well and they are learning the language the same way I did, I understand them a lot better. I understand what they are going through, what they suffer and what they like because some students find fascinating the same things that I do.

In addition to sharing an empathy toward students' learning process, the participants also all shared the experience of having faced and of continuing to face certain main obstacles as non-native English teachers, most notably the academic, rather than colloquial, variety of English

they speak and their corresponding lack of "authentic language use." Regarding their academic English, participants expressed that having learned the language in the classroom has prevented them from having a more authentic, "conversational" language repertoire. This type of contact with the language has resulted in a limited knowledge of vocabulary and colloquial language, which is necessary when interacting with native speakers. Being a Spanish speaking country, Costa Rica offers limited opportunities to practice or use conversational English with native speakers. Participants also felt that this has jeopardized their cultural awareness, as they recognized learning a language goes hand-in-hand with learning the culture behind that language.

During their ETM and their early years as teachers, participants reported discovering an immense passion for their profession, which was bound up with both their empathy for students' contextual needs and constant positive feedback from students. Miguel described how he found a deep appreciation for teaching, noting, "It [the ETM] was not my first option. But then I just fell in love. It was a matter of discovering what I wanted to do. I discovered I wanted to be a teacher." It was as a novice teacher that Rafael was inspired by his students' determination to complete a degree in spite of the difficulties they encountered. He was hired to teach in a remote border town, and the impact of this experience prevails in his memory and has affected his teaching. When I asked about a dramatic event in his early teaching career, he responded:

> I would relate it to the situation of the urgency of adults to have their high school diploma and do whatever they have to do. It was very deep, shocking to me how people finish their homework and then go to study and then wake up very early. I really learned how to appreciate what I have because they were in a very difficult and disadvantageous situation.

> So, that was very dramatic for me in the sense that I had to do my best and tried to continue learning and be a better teacher for them because they needed it.

For María, after gaining some experience teaching kids and teenagers, she realized her true passion was to teach adults and more content courses. It has been encouraging for her to receive positive feedback from her students as this gives her more confidence in her work. She stated:

> When I started the major, I really liked it and now I love it. University level is the best for me. I can say that I really love teaching. I always tell my students that I love teaching and they say, "yeah we can see that." I have taught in primary school, high school, and university levels, and I prefer university.

It was late in the third year of the program that Jaime found out he loved this profession; however, once he started teaching, he learned that he did want to teach. The encouraging comments he received from his students and the strong bond he has forged with them are a driving force in him aspiring to continue being a language instructor on the campus.

Even though Andrés has pushed aside his teaching because of his current position as an administrator, he told me he is clear about his passion for teaching, his subject area, and the impact he has had on his classes. He shared with me some of the encouraging reviews he has gotten from learners:

> I do know that I am very interested in teaching per se. Now that I have discovered that my vocation is teaching that I have become better from others…. I really know what I am talking about. I think I can communicate it well so they (students) have told me that in the reviews "you really love what you do. It's obvious that you love teaching. And I want to love teaching in the way you love it." … "I would like to love something the way you love literature."

Three of the educators mentioned how their participation in an exchange program in the United States positively influenced their cultural awareness and language competence. When narrating the stories about their experiences in the United States, Gary, Andrés, and Rafael agreed that visiting an English-speaking country should be an experience all of their current students should go through. Participants also discussed the unfortunate limitations to providing this type of opportunity for students on their campuses. One participant mentioned that information about scholarships to support this sort of opportunity is not usually communicated on the regional campuses. During the interviews, participants agreed on the pressing need to provide students with authentic interactions with speakers of English. That is why they all mentioned their interest in planning field trips to places where this is likely to happen and in creating alliances with organizations that would promote these types of interactions.

Currently, Gary has developed a project through which his campus and the US Embassy provide a two-year English program to high school students. This program is free of charge to students and is number one program in the country among similar projects. Another connection with the US Embassy was Jaime's opportunity to be a visiting professor through the Fulbright program. His experience at an American college has provided him with the opportunity to organize online chats between students on his campus and students in Chicago. María mentioned a similar practice through her connections with Peace Corps volunteers, whom she often invites to her classes so that students can practice English in a natural environment.

When narrating their stories as learners, most participants mentioned having text-based approaches to language learning, where authentic language use opportunities were not frequent. They all mentioned their expertise in academic English; however, they identified limitations in

what they called everyday language. They felt they lacked the vocabulary and expressions used by speakers in settings other than the classroom and university.

In general, the selective recall of participants' past actions and thoughts help identify the decisions they have made during their teaching years. These actions and thoughts do not simply lie in past patterns and actions but inform educators' current agency in their situated careers. To describe this, Emirbayer and Mische (1998), followed by Priestley, Robinson and Biesta (2015), noted that actors, in these cases educator participants, develop relatively stable patterns of interaction in active response to historical situations where their individual life courses should be conceptualized as the result of their constructive activity in dealing with available resources.

The Here and Now

While past experiences contribute to the development of the qualities and capacities needed for the current practices of my participants, the present accounts for day-to-day working decisions that are difficult to navigate and that influence their ongoing construction of professional agency. The present dimension consists of these educators' reported beliefs and the affective factors behind non-nativeness, classroom agency and institution structure, the role of their relationships, and a strong sense of commitment.

L2 Beliefs and Affective Factors behind Non-nativeness. Speaking a second language, in this case English, comes with social benefits in Costa Rica. Behind the country's global competitiveness is a direct correlation between the number of meaningful job opportunities and speaking English. Being that language and culture are intertwined, speaking English gives speakers access to other cultures' customs and behaviour. This accumulated cultural knowledge confers social status and even power. However, I found it important to make a distinction between being a speaker and being a teacher of a language. The aims in both roles are different; speakers

use the language to get communication across either in transactional or interactional conversations, while language instructors are expected to be models and sources of knowledge and skills.

Participants did not explicitly mention feeling underappreciated because of the fact they are non-native speakers of the language they teach. For Miguel, being a non-native speaker does not affect his confidence as a professional. He said, “I don’t feel less professional because I am a non-native speaker.” María expressed her confidence about her role. She explained: “I feel confident with every single class that I teach. Everything I say, I feel sure of what I am saying. If someone comes and observes me, I am ok. I am really proud of the classes that I plan.” However, that was not always the case. María recalled that at early in her career she was full of fear of not being able to answer students’ language questions. Jaime and Rosy mentioned that they do not feel that confident about their linguistic competence, so they have compensated for this “lack” by developing strong teaching skills.

Following a linguistic discourse analysis approach, I paid attention to participants’ trasncripts during our conversations to identify any manifestation of their feelings toward their condition as non-native speakers. When sharing their stories about how being a non-native English speaker has influenced their teaching, professional development, self-confidence, they recorded feelings of being or feeling afraid, worried, nervous, judged, frustrated, shy, guilty about not knowing, and insecure. They also mentioned words like “barrier,” “disadvantage,” “difficult,” and “mistakes” and noted the key role of working hard and studying a lot before teaching a class.

In his stories, Jaime mentioned that, fortunately, his campus does not put a judgmental value on educators’ linguistic competence, but on their intentionality to be actively engaged. This idea was confirmed by analyzing public hiring documents. After analyzing three hiring ads from three different campuses, there was no record of preferences for NESTs in administrators’ hiring

policies and practices. In fact, teaching credentials, participation in projects, and publications were the main criteria listed. Miguel and Freddie were the only participants who openly discussed the erroneous idea of expecting students to achieve native-like competence. Instead, they acknowledge the importance of comprehensibility and develop error-tolerant language learning approaches.

Classroom agency and institutional structure. The agency paradox of being an adult educator in a public university reaffirmed participants' classroom autonomy, which was influenced by the availability of resources and power differentials. On the one hand, the institution claims instructors are expected to make significant decisions and take initiative in their context development (students, institution and community), but, on the other hand, there were power differentials that limited their actions outside the classroom (budget, voice, participation). Despite this conflict, all participants felt free to make classroom decisions.

Autonomous classroom decisions. Even amidst some disillusionment with regard to their lack of influence in institutional decisions, all participants narrated in their stories their freedom to design their classroom practice based on their informed experiences and learners' needs. This freedom included their teaching methodology, type of classroom rapport, and assessment strategies. Freddie described his view of classroom agency in the following way: "In the moment you teach a course and you develop or design your syllabus, you can choose the type of evaluation you have and the type of methodology you are going to use with the students." Miguel reaffirmed this independence and commented on the need to be mindful about each context's needs. He explained:

> There is something that we need to take into account. We are talking about different contexts. The reality we have on one campus is not the same reality we have on another campus or on

the main campus. We need to acknowledge that when we are planning our courses. The needs are completely different.

Gary shared with me that she has used this independence to increase her learners' language achievement by facilitating engaging classes. She has done this even though the university setting seemed to promote less enthusiastic class activities. For Andrés, designing course outlines and planning classroom work are moments in his work that he enjoys:

> I am lucky enough to be able to determine and make a lot of decisions in my practice.… I teach the course the moment where I sit down and plan course and decide what I am gonna do, how I am gonna do this semester. That's a moment in the year, I do this twice a year, those are probably some of the most exciting moments for me. Sitting down and imagining these four months teaching it and planning what we are gonna do.

David has gone beyond focusing on classroom strategies and has decided to make content changes. Through his experience teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), he has come to realize that learners find dissonance in a language class when they cannot relate what they learn to the language they need to learn for their profession. That is why David, in collaboration with Geography, Ethics, Gastronomy, and Biology instructors, has customized the content of his English classes. This change has proved to him that students are more motivated to learn and want to go to into the field and speak English.

Unfortunately, not all educators feel free to make content changes. In fact, institutional instruction to not change content in courses has provoked some friction among educators as they claimed it is an intrusion from the main campus. Participants attributed power to the main campus, the Faculty of Philosophy to be specific, over the ETM, recognizing that this faculty is

the “owner” of this program. This faculty has risen into a permanent power position over curricular changes in the program, and changes to content are off-limits.

Miguel explained how the replication of behaviour from more experienced professors has impacted this power differential: “Sometimes we feel this power that comes from former professors and the main campus that you have to do everything the way you were taught. And sometimes liberating yourself can be difficult.” For Rosy, she felt her hands are tied and openly expressed her frustration:

> I was trying to do something about what we are going to be doing the next course. We will be teaching and … we cannot change content. We decided not to use the book that we always use. But there is a descriptor with the contents that they already have, and we can’t change it.

Gary was also open about her similar experiences with power differentials:

> The main campus … they made decisions… for example we depend on the other campus because they own the career and the major and the program, all of the decisions they made. We see that students are not really mastering the use of the language and we would like to make changes and we have to ask these authorities for permission.

In her story, María explored a similar frustration of feeling limited regarding curriculum changes, “we belong to the central campus, even the major, everything belongs to the main branch. We cannot make decisions on our own. Everything belongs to them. We cannot make changes, nothing.”

Andrés, however, felt that these complaints are not valid. He explained that there is a guideline (descriptor), but that there is independence to make content decisions. He said:

> You have the description of the course; you have objectives of the course and topics but that is about it. What you do with those objectives, with those topics that’s up to you. Who says

that you have to teach all of those topics with the same relevance? … as a professional you should be in control of what you think works the most for your students.

Andrés's and David's experience in administrative positions might be the reason why they feel more confident to make more drastic curriculum decisions. None of the other participants have ever had a similar administrative position, and as Andrés said, being "on the other side" has given him a different understanding of processes.

Availability of resources. The educators, in my study, felt their agency was affected by the availability and type of resources they need to make decisions and take initiative. All the participants expressed that they have plenty of technological resources, in fact, they can use projectors and smart boards and have access to wireless internet service in all classrooms. However, it is not the physical resources that affects their practice, but rather a lack of technological competence and training made them feel at a disadvantage. They stated a need for professional development opportunities, but their participation in those opportunities is jeopardized by their tight schedules, multiple jobs, and geographical distance. They also added that much of the content in workshops that are provided is not aligned with their interest in improving their technology competence and EFL teaching practice. Participants also reported a lack of opportunities to network formally and informally with other colleagues, which they mentioned drives their desire to do collaborative research and outreach.

Gary expressed her resentment at how educators on the main campus can participate in different technology training sessions on a monthly basis, which is not the case on her campus, where one or two training sessions a year are held. As part of the data collection, I also asked participants to share the challenges they faced in their professional life in the form of a reflection

activity (Appendix C). When expressing his challenges in this activity, Rafael highlighted the lack or deficient mentoring process in the institution.

Regionalization as a macro-level policy. Driven by the regionalization policy, participants noticed economic, social, and symbolic capital differentials between the main campus and the regional campuses. The institution as a whole is an arena for a struggle of control, where currently the main campus keeps its dominant position. Participants on all campuses claimed they wanted more social recognition and participation; they felt underestimated and diminished just because of their geographical location.

The participants perceived an economic differential in the few programs offered as a result of the limited budget allocated to regional campuses. In this matter, participants felt they had no voice in the decision-making process about financial allocation to regional campuses. Andrés commented on the close connection between majors offered and budget. He said the Pérez Zeledón campus does not offer many curricular options to the community as a result of the limited finances that are provided: “It all depends on the money. We don't have money for that course, we don't have money for that major… whoever establishes the budget, they have power … Money plays a very important role, what programs are open, what options are offered.” Gary shared similar feelings:

> (regional) Campuses have disadvantages in the type of academic offering. For example, the main campus offers this myriad of majors that our campus doesn’t…. There are some things that the main campus should really distribute better like times for research and more majors in other campuses and also money for projects and for teachers. It is like they want it all.

Jaime connected the idea of power and budgeting in discussing the way the main campus oversees the decisions they make. All projects designed in the Sarapiquí campus are scrutinized

by the main campus administration even though they are not familiar with contextualized processes: “When we want to create an outreach project or program, we need the approval from the main campus in terms of money and the benefits it will bring to our campus and the main campus.” Going beyond financal issues, Jaime also made a strong claim about the dominant position of the main campus in terms of information distribution: “I think it is not a matter of money but a matter of information because we don't get much information from the main campus. We don't get information about this exchange programs or travelling abroad opportunities.”

Freddie extended the conversation of budget and power in explaining the way the main campus does not recognize regional voices as active participants in education processes: “Rural campuses get resources and that is it, they don't get involved and they [the main campus administration] don't recognize their voice.” This desire for recognition and participation was also registered when the participants expressed their frustration with having no voice in program decisions; they feel they are only witnesses. David shared that was the case for language instructors in the Sarapiquí campus:

> I feel like they don’t pay attention to what we say. The other day the coordinator in Heredia called me to invite me or any other professor to work in the [course] outlines for the semester. One professor from our campus attended the meeting. When she came back, she told me that she was there invisible because they have everything planned…. They didn't pay attention to her suggestions and she was invisible…. This is the way they treat sedes regionales [regional campuses].

Rosy expressed that EFL teachers on Chorotega campus showed a similar concern:

> They [the main campus authorities] don't pay attention to our differences and we have been begging for them to look at or to put themselves in our shoes and they don't care. They say what they say and that is it. Nobody can change it. They make the changes for the malla curricular [program's outline] and, from this campus, nobody was invited to be part of that session.

Economic power differentials have led to social differentials in which the education of both students and teachers from regional campuses is diminished as they are labeled "less qualified." Freddie mentioned that was the case for university teachers on the Coto campus. In fact, that situation has motivated them to have more active agency in the way they make efforts to be more involved and work hard. He mentioned:

> There is this thought that there is a better education in the main campus, probably the quality of education is lower quality if compared. But I think that most professors here, we want to change that. We work really hard. We get involved with that cause.

An unfortunate consequence of this social differential is that learners develop a self-perception of being less qualified. David stated that this social status gap has permeated learners' minds on the Sarapiquí campus to the point that they see their learning environment as deficient: "Even students believe that studying in main campus is better than studying here. That a main campus is better than a branch. That is not good and not fair." It was Freddie who recognized that this derogatory self-recognition might be a mental representation of university teachers on the Coto campus who have transmitted it to their learners inadvertently:

> Sometimes we have that in mind. I don't think that people from the same campus say that I think that sometimes that is even in our minds. We transmit that to our students because in the end there is no study that shows that. That can be only our minds.

The main consequence of the power structure described by participants relates to the idea that learners become the victims of unfair decisions. Domination from the main campus jeopardizes learners' and community members' access to equal opportunities as new students are condemned to choose majors that do not align with their interests, values, passions, and abilities. As Andrés recognized, the Pérez Zeledón campus does not have any systematic support to counsel students who struggle with their program decision or dissonance, and that it is only an active intentional involvement on the part of the teachers that could help students navigate this challenge.

These stories drive educators to adopt a strong call for active agency in the form of community advocacy. This is a stance they feel they must take in order to avoid brain drain and provide just and informed opportunities for students and residents in the community.

Commitment to the cause. The participants' commitment to the community is informed by their nuanced understanding of the needs and opportunities for rural students and the multiple roles they need to adopt on campus. Participants' life histories identified them as rural students who faced similar challenges as the ones their students encounter on a daily basis. Their belonging to the institution and community explains their dedication to their profession. Specifically, participants shared a firm commitment to support language learners in their professional academic achievement. This commitment included taking on multiple roles and duties, being passionate about their work, being a lifelong language learner, and advocating for vulnerable students. Participants' multiple roles in the institution pushed them to be counselors, advocators, project developers, a department coordinator, and the head of an academic department.

From the many roles Andrés has had in his workplace (literature professor, oral communication instructor, project coordinator), his current role as an academic leader allows him to describe his commitment to influence people positively,

> The role of leader, which I realize is not just very important but also very careful role you have to play. What kind of a leader you wanna be, how to guide them on the way, how to tell them what to do if they need to be told, how to make decisions, how to ask people and make sure that they are understanding that what you are telling them is important.

His experience relates to the fact that educators' engagement with their surroundings goes beyond the classroom and may require them to navigate the complexities of an institution at the academic and administrative level.

During our conversations, Gary shared the impact of her involvement as a project developer in her professional life. She recognized this role as decisive for her, the institution, and the community as she has witnessed the positive influence of coordinating a language school that offered accessible and high-quality English classes for all members of the community and neighboring communities for nine years. Her project was recognized as one of the top ten outreach projects among all branches of the institution, country-wide, and this accomplishment elevated the reputation of her campus.

Rosy had a similar experienced to Gary's. She co-designed and developed a project that targeted rural entrepreneurs in remote communities in her province. The project offered ESP classes free of cost. Just like Gary's project, Rosy's was highly ranked by the institution and also benefitted her campus's prestige. From her experience in this project, she participated in an international conference, published a journal article, and co-authored a book. Her project led the way to similar projects that have been developed in the region.

For his part, Jaime mentioned that students' language proficiency is what drives him and his colleagues to make risky decisions and even defy the system: "That is what we are changing our curriculum in that major. We are trying to teach them more English courses because we want them [students] to graduate with an intermediate or high English level."

In his stories, Miguel constantly identified a connection between experience and commitment. The more experience he gained in the institution, the deeper his commitment toward learners and community. He connected this commitment with the need to be in constant self-actualization. He said, "I try to improve myself every year and every semester because of that. People will not expect less from what I have been giving." In fact, one of the reasons behind his decision to complete another master's degree was his need to learn more about language teaching and learning to contribute to ESP programs on campus. His story resonated with Freddie's initiative to complete the same master's program as Miguel. From the many roles Freddie has adopted in his life, he recognized that being a learner is the one he has identified with the most.

David has also engaged in voluntary acts of learning throughout his life and mentioned his desire to keep updating himself professionally, which include his initiatives to be in contact with a native-speaking Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) trainer in the region in order to "be better, a better speaker, a better listener, a better writer, in order to help my students." Similarly, Jaime stated, "I want to take the master or PhD or any other university program because I want to be updated and I don't want to stop studying." Even though Rafael did not explicitly mention his interest in getting another degree in EFL, he is currently completing a Science Teaching Major as his dream is to teach this subject in English. He did mention his strong commitment to always being on the cutting edge of new knowledge and tendencies, stating that "everything can be improved so you can be changing. You can check what is new so

that you can improve." Gary also mentioned her passion for formal education and self-actualization. She stated, "I always wanted to study more and more." Getting another degree is not on her radar, however, she mentioned she was excited to take a more active role in her professional development now that her kids are bigger and demand less time from her.

Freddie, Miguel, and David mentioned their concerns about factors affecting Indigenous students and commented on how they made decisions in their practice to ensure students would have an opportunity in the institution. Miguel shared his first reactions when he encountered the situation in his beginning days on his campus:

> I had them in the first year of the major as freshmen and I realized they were at a disadvantage from the first moment. That really shocked me and shaped the view that I had about teaching nowadays. When I saw that I asked them to read a text, something that they had to do in their "bachillerato" test, and they were not able to do it. I said "ok, in here I have other challenges." My perspective about teaching changed a lot.

David shared that the campus receives 20 or 25 Indigenous students from around the country, mainly from a big Indigenous community nearby. He mentioned their communities are vulnerable places. They come from satellite high schools and adult learning centres where the teaching and learning methodologies are totally different from each other. During the first few classes, David remembered, they approached him and said "profe yo no entiendo ni papa" ["professor, I don't understand anything"]. He also said:

> In the first class of English where you are just saying your name. One student said "profe, lo siento pero yo no entiendo nada" [prof, I am sorry, but I don't understand anything]. So, I have to switch to Spanish and ask why. And they started explaining that they come from a telesecundaria with only one teacher for all subjects.

Freddie, in particular, shared his anguish at the vulnerability of this group of students and prompted the institution to commit to providing stronger support to avoid imminent withdrawal:

> I see a vulnerable population here that is the Indigenous students that come from indigenous territories. They are at a disadvantage compared to the ones that come from private institutions.... I think the university and authorities have tried to help them in different ways, but that is not enough because in the end they always fail the course. They drop out. So, I see that many students here have economic problems, their families cannot afford their studies and university is the only chance they have to improve their conditions, but some of them decide to drop out and look for a job.

The participants' profession is not limited to teaching; they have had to take on roles as counselors, advocators, project developers, a department coordinator, and the head of academic department. These roles are informed by their transformation which has been shaped by their experience. The more experience they have, the more confident they feel to move forward teaching and take other risks. Taking an administrative role also connects them with a "hidden" agenda and processes that are hard to navigate and are even invisible if you are an instructor only.

Not surprisingly, educators' multiple roles on campus and in the community came with challenges in the time and effort they devote to the relational dimension in their profession. Teachers' active professional agency requires them to interpret and negotiate with their colleagues, their students, and administration the multiple possibilities implied in their workplace and their dilemmas; make independent choices that would benefit all these agents; and find balance between their personal preferences, shared collective understandings and situated needs.

The relational element of agency. Participants' stories made reference to the relationships they built at the workplace and how the connections with students, colleagues, administration and the community have influenced their agency. Participants showed their intentional actions to promote collective efforts with other members of their institution and beyond. Participants shared their capacity for institutional collective action in the way they built professional relationships on and off campus. At the external level, their connections with other institutions, organizations, and people at the international and local level were manifestations of the participants' desire to expand the cultural awareness and language competency of students and faculty.

Internal connections with colleagues were manifested in the way they co-authored research and publications and co-developed projects. Rosy shared her positive experience in co-developing an outreach project with two more colleagues that was followed by a series of collaborative publications and conference presentations. Jaime shared the experiences he gained by co-authoring and co-presenting with his colleagues and how this involvement helped him manage and increase his confidence for more individual decisions.

At the external level, participants showed their capacity for collective action through their active affiliation and partnership with national and international organizations. Some of the national organizations included the MPE (Ministry of Public Education), a Teaching English for Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) school, the Chamber of Tourism, and other public higher education institutions with whom they have organized academic events. International relationships included one with the US Embassy and the Sarapiquí campus's initiative to provide students and faculty with opportunities to enhance their cultural awareness through exchange programs. Educators at this institution mentioned their partnerships with colleges in

Canada, the United States and Spain. María also discussed her experience partnering with Peace Corps volunteers she brought to her classes to provide students with authentic English language practice.

Participants shared that they, unfortunately, also experienced conflict in their relationships. María discussed her trouble understanding her students use of social media like Facebook and Instagram and their posts. Most importantly, she struggled to understand the careless way they use drugs:

> They [the students] are consuming a lot of drugs in that area. I don't know if it is similar in other parts of the country, but in that area, drugs are very common. And they talk about that like any topic and I don't know I'm so afraid and I ask them why you are saying that? and they make jokes about that.

Gary's dissonance with students relates to her personal experience as a learner. She found herself struggling to empathize with students' lack of commitment to their studies. She mentioned, "now we're having a different population, students want to give just a little less each day." She compared herself to her students and admitted that even though she was sometimes "lazy," she always complied with homework and presentation requirements. Unfortunately, that is not the case in her classes as she said, "Students just don't care."

Participants discussed incidents in which they have identified micro-aggressions from their colleagues. Some of the common verbal accusations, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicated hostile slights included being judged because of language proficiency. María recorded her fear of making oral presentations in front of her colleagues, saying that she felt monitored and judged because of her linguistic errors. Also, being labeled as an "easy teacher" is an example of the insensitivity participants have dealt with. There are two reasons that explain

this label. First, when instructors record high percentages of students passing their courses, it is interpreted as these instructors offering easy classes and designing easy tests. This then is translated as students not having to make an effort and ultimately not learning. Second, when instructors obtain high marks in the faculty evaluation system, rather than being celebrated instructors are often accused of pleasing students and the quality of their classroom instruction is diminished.

In addition to the previous events, Miguel mentioned the pressure he has felt from more experienced teachers in their interest to make him replicate their behaviour. This judgement has pushed Andrés to take an informed stance to ignore their comments:

> I don't care whether other professors might say about many of my students passing my class or failing my class. A lot of things are said around campus about all students failing this class with this professor and what about this other teacher nobody fails the class? What is all that about? So, I have taken the stance not caring about that. Really closing my ears because I feel pretty confident about what I am doing in my classes.

Gary talked about how having previously had a positive experience with teamwork in teaching affected her relational element on the regional campus where she unexpectedly dealt with colleagues' hostility to sharing and networking. Currently, she yearns for spaces to meet with colleagues and share teaching ideas. She mentioned that other departments have those meetings, but unfortunately now the Foreign Languages Department does not have any. The main consequence of this lack of connection is, as Gary said, a lack of community among educators. She said, "I don't feel the department is close." Despite the presence of conflict in relations with colleagues, most participants also recalled their involvement co-authoring papers, participating in conferences, and co-developing projects with other colleagues.

The harshest relationship is the one between faculty and the administration. At the local level, two participants expressed their difficulty in establishing good rapport with administrators. Rosy had a negative experience in 2018 when she felt judged and accused of an incident with students. Freddie admitted to having a judgmental view of people who are in leadership positions because he believes they are only interested in power and self-centred attention. All participants, however, mentioned their resentment of the higher administration, the one from the main campus. They mentioned lacking constant and close communication. These simple and directional terms mentioned by Andrés in his narrative denote role differences in control and vulnerability. They indicate disrespect, disempowerment, power over/power under, and marginalization.

As a final note on the present (practical-evaluative dimension) of educators, their professional agency seemed to be characterized by the clarity of their aims. They all felt pressured to see a product of their teaching in the form of students' high linguistic competence. Not only that, they recognized their need to fulfill another aim as rural educators, one that spanned language teaching and pushed them to create initiatives and take stances regarding community improvement. Navigating in their present, educators required both processes of interruption and continuity. They broke practices of the past (old school replication, power differentials, geographical barriers) to advance to new modes of doing (authentic language learning, meaningful learning, positive rapport). In this case, authentic language learning is the one gained by using language in context in real-world communication and avoiding drills. Participants have not simply reproduced practices, they have shown themselves to be creative subjects (Sulkunin, 1982) that have produced their own systems of meaning by taking advantage of their surroundings, pushing processes, and making informed plans for their future. These decisions

speak for their active efforts to make choices and intentional action which translates in high agency.

Career Life Plan: Forging a Future Now

Long- and short-term aspirations within the teaching profession relate to the projective dimension of professional agency. The aspirations of educator-participants in this study were frequently rooted in their sense of belonging and commitment to their profession, with a weighty sense of accountability for students' and the community's economic, social, and academic development. The need for academic professional development and empowerment through community projects stood out in participants' stories.

The need for academic professional development. Many of the educators envisioned pursuing another graduate degree. María, Jaime, Andrés, David, and Miguel discussed their plans to complete a PhD program either abroad or in their country. Freddie mentioned that although he does not plan to complete a PhD, he is working hard to complete his second master's program. Although having a PhD does confer some prestige in terms of their career, participants discussed their decision to pursue one not in terms of individual interests but in terms of the effect that having more PhD professors at the institution would have in helping it find a louder voice and gain more respect.

Their interest to advance in their professional development is also informed by their precarious condition of employment, since none of them were tenured faculty. Rafael's uncertainty about his job is clear in his statement that "here I don't feel safe." Jaime mentioned his aspiration to be tenured faculty, while Freddie explored what he thought was the reason for his and his colleagues' active engagement in professional development:

> I think probably most of us make our decisions based on someday reaching a kind of stability in the institution, in the university. Right now, for instance, we are asked to get a master's degree in our field, English Teaching. We graduated in a different area and we were told that if we didn't have a master's degree in 2019 or 2020 we are not going to be hired anymore.

Miguel discussed the positive contribution of conferences to his professional development, knowledge of language teaching techniques, networking with other professionals, and confidence. He shared a photograph that represented his excitement about the opportunity to share knowledge with two distinguished international keynote speakers during one the conferences he attended in 2018.

Participants also acknowledged the key role of collaborative work and expressed their interest in creating formal mentoring spaces, co-authoring projects, and participating in conferences. María discussed her positive view of the benefits of attending conferences and sharing her ideas with colleagues:

> I have participated in some conferences and that has changed my mind a lot because I have talked to other teachers and professors from the same area, so you learn a lot there. You share with people with the same field.

Freddie described from the positive benefits of collaborative work in the following way: “I would like to continue working at the university level for me that's highly enriching. You learned a lot. I have really good friends in academia. Also, something I really enjoyed is that you learn from others a lot.” Rosy described the positive impact of co-developing a project with colleagues and her aspiration to engage in similar initiatives: “There are many things that we can share about this experience. I would love to keep on doing something like that in the future.”

In addition to participating in conferences, all the participants mentioned their desire to do more research and publish more. Freddie mentioned his current engagement in action research and mentioned his hope to keep on doing this in his future. María found high value in doing action research as she thinks it directly improves her teaching practice:

> I imagined myself doing research a lot, but action research. Observing my students, doing research to help them.… I'd like that part of doing research, but doing something with the research. That is how I see myself writing because of my experience in the classroom.

Miguel also expressed his agentive qualities by envisioning doing research as a self-improvement strategy and as a direct way to contribute to his field. He said, "teaching and research go hand in hand, so it is something that I will keep doing for the rest of my life to improve my own practice and to help others improve their practice."

Woven into educators' stories was the idea that doing more research equals solutions to their communities' needs. Participants identified themselves as drivers of positive change so long as they engage in outreach projects. The projects that they have been involved in have promoted accessible English language learning through continuing education and tailored ESP courses. But their contribution was not limited to language teaching and learning as they have engaged in projects dealing with local historical research, non-formal learning spaces in different areas, and institutional quality assessment.

Empowering learners and the community through projects. Participants aimed to contribute to their profession and community by developing English language and outreach projects. They discussed their desire to provide more programs at the institution so that residents have more varied study opportunities. Participants mentioned the limited opportunities that

language learners and they themselves have to practice the language in more authentic settings, so they identified a need to search for international or local English-speaking networking.

Freddie, in particular, was interested in engaging in a project that could help Indigenous communities. To take initiative in this project, he told me that he felt he would need to get specialized training. David shared his concerns about offering limited non-contextualized undergraduate and graduate programs to the community. He mentioned his participation on a committee that is designing a master's program in Tourism that would benefit local students. Andrés also mentioned the need for a more varied list of programs on his campus and mentioned his participation in meetings where the administration and faculty have been discussing the future orientation of the institution. He believed that having a clearer institutional positioning may map out the route to designing better-informed programs. Rafael is working with a non-profit organization in his community that is documenting archeological findings. His main interest is contributing to the Spanish-to-English translation of the documents.

The idea of working on language projects for the institution and the community is a desirable goal of participants. Gary mentioned her initiative in expanding the language institute she has been co-developing to reach out to kids. As she explained, her experience and knowledge as a teacher for the MPE are transferable to this project's aim. Additionally, she recalled that parents in the community have always approached her to share their kids' needs for formal, high-quality English learning. She found this is a real need and she is very positive about opening the project in a near future.

Jaime mentioned his interest in taking the initiative to seek for similar exchange opportunities as the one he had. He found that being a visiting professor in the USA provided him with valuable language learning and culture awareness. He feels it's an urgent need to give students

and faculty similar experiences as he thinks that travelling to an English-speaking country is the only way to develop linguistic skills. Rosy mentioned her interest in focusing on providing ESP courses to the community after her retirement next year. Her initiative is rooted in her community's tourism-focused economy. She found that more locals need to speak English to benefit from the economic development of their province.

Miguel was not explicit about the orientation of his project interests; however, he emphasized his intention to develop his own agentic ideas. He said, "I would like to have my own project, my one research or my own outreach project in the future." He mentioned that, for now, he is focused on completing his master's degree on the main campus and being a full-time instructor. Those two roles demand all his time.

Narrative Research and Professional Agency

Even though telling stories is a common social practice, their role in research does not easily fit the conventional qualitative paradigms in the Latin American context (Blanco, 2011; Bolívar, 2017). In fact, positivistic critiques propose that it presents a potential inherent conflict of interest for the researcher. Rosy reminded me about that during our very first meeting when she directly asked me: "What would be the contribution of telling my story for your research?" I also felt intimidated by Miguel's comments on the importance of objectivity in research and his questioning about the contribution of his subjective life history to my PhD endeavour. Without a doubt, their comments raised concerns about my research orientation. However, I predicted that reaction since the moment I decided to follow a research approach that was non-traditional within the research community in my home country.

One of the reasons for my decision to use life history research was my interest in listening to educators' voices so that they would challenge their narratives and the implicit assumptions that

have shaped their practices, which is not common practice in my research community in Costa Rica. I hope to attain reflection and transformation that may result from critical involvement with narrative research. That is why, during the interviews, participants were encouraged to explore the ways their circumstances may have influenced their professional agency. I intentionally framed research interviews that followed a conversational and personal tone knowing that EFL teaching programs in Costa Rica do not usually create a space for deeper teacher reflection.

From reflection to professional agency. Participants explicitly shared their gratitude for the opportunity to reflect upon their practice and supported my ideas about the contribution of telling and listening stories and the limited spaces to do so in our EFL teaching communities. They shared different ways of engagement with reflection. Rafael expressed, "I have enjoyed reflecting about my practice, and there are things that I didn't remember that you have made me take out of my mind." He mentioned this after our first interview. In fact, during our first meeting, he told me he would only have time for one interview. Fortunately, to my surprise, after completing our first interview, he expressed his interest in participating in the next two as he valued the space to reflect on his life career. Miguel also shared how the conversations provided a space for reflection and expressed high appreciation for this dialogic experience. He said:

> Thank you so much. Having this type of conversation with you helps me a lot to reflect upon what I have to do in academia and my role … I love the experience and I loved sharing with you once more.

Jaime was open and admitted his lack of prior participation in reflective exercises like the one presented in this narrative research. This finding may speak for not only a lack of intentional teacher reflective practice but also a lack of institutional practice. He shared,

> You really made me think about myself, about my background, my ten years working for my university, which I think I had never thought about before. You made me think about what I have been doing during these ten years and thank you for reminding me that.

Finally, David's comments went beyond the impact of this narrative research on his personal reflection experience and mentioned the collective element. David's ideas align with the understanding that reflexivity practices place the teachers in relation to their role in society. He included other people in the reflection process. He mentioned that reflection like the one he experienced through his participation in this narrative research could be implemented with other teachers to work collaboratively and target challenges together. His initiative speaks for professional agency development not only for himself but for his teaching community. He mentioned,

> I want to say that it has been a nice reflection process talking to you about my life. I think it is a good exercise that we can implement with these questions with the staff because it is one way to keep the team together and fix what needs to be fixed. You have made me reflect on my life and my teaching.

Summary

These narratives moved through time, which allowed for a thematic interpretation moving from past and present to show a possible future. The educator participants brought forth their stories to show how their personal attributes and efforts interacted with structural factors such as local/global power, relationships, and roles. Their stories answered questions about understanding the influence of prior experience in their current teaching practice. Educators discussed their memories of how taking limited opportunities available to them, along with hard work and sacrifice, have provided them with the skills and commitment to take a more active

role in their communities. Their visions of the future are coloured by structural self-images and mental representations of growing deeper roots on their campuses and in their communities. Their individual stories enabled me to construct a collective memory in which connections to dominance, intrusion, relationships, commitment, resilience, and hard work are shown to have shaped a transdisciplinary identity that places them in the in-between-ness of being a language learner, language instructor, rural educator, adult educator, and outreach project developer.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

> *Understandings of participants' lives in context can never be truly whole or complete; however, we must strive to honor the richness and complexity of lives lived. We do so not by taking information and slicing it into discrete bits and storing the pieces in separate containers, but by trying to understand, in a holistic way, the connectedness and interrelatedness of human experience within complex social systems. (Cole & Knowles, 2001,101)*

The purpose of this study was to explore and interpret how the rural working contexts of adult educators teaching in postsecondary education interact with their condition as non-native English-speaking instructors to inform their professional agency. This topic was premised on the need to exhibit educators' unique and contextualized rural experiences and offer insight into directions for the evolution of theoretical understanding and institutional policy and practice regarding professional agency in rural higher education. The following discussion of findings contributes to answering the following research sub-questions:

a. How do adult educators' perceptions of their life experiences as non-native English speakers impact their existing and potential professional agency?

b. How does the rural context of their professional lives inform their existing and potential professional agency?

c. How might the voices of these adult educators suggest directions for the evolution of institutional policy and practice regarding professional agency in rural higher education?

d. How might these adult educators' experiences within this particular context suggest directions for the evolution of the theoretical understanding of professional agency of NNESTs in rural higher education?

In this chapter, I discuss, in conversation with the literature, what I have discovered through my research. This section includes a discussion of six themes which include: EFL university teachers' perceptions of their professional agency, exercising agency through a

lifelong learning orientation, transdisciplinary roles in EFL teachers' careers, corporate EFL teachers' professional agency, once a language learner, now a language teacher and the sociocultural influences over EFL teachers' professional agency.

EFL University Teachers' Perceptions of their Professional Agency

While conducting and transcribing the research interviews and analyzing the narratives, I had the opportunity to deeply reflect on the participants' stories. The time I spent travelling from one community to another and on my return trips to Canada were opportunities for serious thought about the participants' identities, how they see themselves, and how I see them. I did not want my own personal identity re-construction experience after living in an English-speaking country to interfere with their framing of identity, mainly because only one of them has lived abroad for a significant period of time, and none have completed a degree abroad.

It was during my first interviews that I started witnessing some dissonance between the concepts I used in my research and the way my interviews were unfolding. At the beginning of my research process, the title of my proposal was "A Life History Narrative on the Professional Agency of Rural Non-native English Speaking Adult Educators." After my conversations with the participants, I started to dismantle the wording in it and I realized that I included the concept "rural" in my proposal as the result of translating the Spanish term "*sede regional*," which in Costa Rica is the title given to smaller university campuses situated in communities far from the main campus. The purpose of strategic campus locations is to reach out to people who cannot commute or move to the capital city so that they have access to the same level of education and development opportunities (Arauz, Schmidt & Tabash, 2012). However, the Spanish language does have a word similar in meaning to "rural" in English, which caused some confusion for

participants who asked for clarification of my use of this word. After the first two interviews, I decided to use the Spanish concept “sede regional” and not “rural campus” during the interviews.

It was during the second round of interviews that I started to realize that participants had never been faced with questions about being non-native speakers. My intention when using this term was never to bestow legitimacy on the distinction between “native” and “non-native” nor to reinforce it as an artificial and disempowering construct, a possibility noted by Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001). I came to recognize that because their only experience in an English-speaking country may have been as a tourist, their negotiation of identity would never relate to mine. This realization made me read native speakerism theory and the ideas behind the dichotomy between NEST and NNEST from a different perspective. I came to the realization that participants in my study had never experienced discriminatory hiring practices and the discourses they have heard have never determined their confidence or their highly valued position as university instructors.

Lastly, from the wording in their stories, I also found that they never identified themselves as adult educators. Even when their role in the institution includes teacher training, outreach, and facilitating workshops and programs with adults, they felt more comfortable referring to themselves and their colleagues as language instructors or university professors.

Engaged conversations about NNEST topics with one of my supervisors helped me challenge my assumptions. After deep reflection, I decided to change the title of the dissertation to “Professional Agency of Costa Rican University EFL Teachers on Regional Campuses: A Life History Narrative.” First, even though there are strong linguistic and social arguments that favour the use of the adjective “rural”, I decided to change it for the noun “regional campuses”. A linguistic argument for using the term “rural” is that this word is what linguistics call a cognate. In linguistics, cognates are words that have a common etymological origin, they are spelled the

same and have same meaning (Crystal, 2011). The word "rural" in both Spanish and English is spelled the same and has the same meaning. It is not only a cognate but also it was historically recognized as a high frequency cognate due to its usage (Johnston, 1941). A social argument to use this word is the fact that sub-campuses from the university in this study were settled in rural areas, as described by the Planning Program from the Ministry of National Planning (Arauz, Schmidt & Tabash, 2012). However, my decision to change this word was informed by the participants' lack of self-perception as rural. By doing this shift, I focused on participants' workplace and not on a personal attribute.

Second, in the title, I dropped referring to participants as "non-native" speakers and included their nationality. By doing this, I wanted to use a more frequent and relatable identifier. The EFL teaching environment in Costa Rica, as a Spanish-speaking country, is populated by language instructors for whom Spanish is their first language. Lastly, I changed "adult educators" to "university teachers" as this concept was the one used by participants to identify themselves. I wanted to honour their self-perception.

The particular way in which participants in this study perceive their non-nativeness answers my research question about how their perceptions of their life experiences as non-native English speakers impact their existing and potential professional agency. The link between agency and identity is rooted in how the teachers' constructed self-understandings of what it means to be a professional on a regional university campus in Costa Rica. Their teacher identity interplays with context and discourses that ignore such an identifier.

Exercising Agency through a Lifelong Learning Orientation

Mahboob (2010) noted that lifelong learning theory usually has a negative connotation in NNEST studies. As a result of the common monolingual bias in English language teaching and applied linguistics research that have stemmed practices of discrimination, NNESTs are usually portrayed as lifelong language learners who get fossilized at various stages of their language learning process either as individuals or as communities (Selinker, 1992). Despite the evidence of discrimination against NNESTs around the world, EFL instructors in this study did not mention any hiring challenges nor record any negative identity construction because of the non-nativeness of the language they teach. Their hiring was based on their credentials. However, they did mention instances of pressure to be accurate English language communicators. This pressure came mainly during their participation in academic events with other colleagues and when learners asked them language questions.

Contrary to NNEST studies, in education, lifelong learning has been a guiding principle promoted by multiple authors for a long time. This is seen in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) global report in 1972 and the publication of *Learning: The Treasure Within* by Delors in 1996. These two documents elaborated the establishment of lifelong learning as a global educational paradigm. While the Faure Report (1972) granted a transformative meaning to lifelong education and reclaimed the tension between the humanistic versus economist approach to education, Delors Report (1996) introduced the term “learning throughout life” and presented it as the educational paradigm of the future. Though both reports represent ambitious and sometimes called “utopian” approaches, they have contributed to debates on the purpose of education and learning. In both documents, developed and developing countries were encouraged to promote lifelong education and learning as the

master concept for educational policies. Mwaikokesya, Osborne, and Houston (2014) documented that, since the publication of those reports, there has been considerable interest in transforming educational establishments into institutions of lifelong learning aimed at creating individuals who are capable of learning not only during their time as students but also later.

This is the case of the participants in this study, who saw themselves as lifelong language learners after years of being teachers. More specifically, participants mentioned their openness and sense of responsibility to never stop learning the English language, to seek for opportunities to improve and update their teaching skills, and even to learn about other fields of study in order to advocate for students. They created alliances with organizations and enrolled in formal education programs to support their growth. Their decisions about the relationships they build and the organizations they connect with are influenced by global forces, as the United States is their primary English-speaking ally. In fact, the university curriculum defines American English as the standard to be taught in all programs. Andrés, Rafael, and Gary's students felt this US presence through their participation in exchange programs, and Jaime's recent faculty exchange program and Gary's and David's current project alliances involve the US Embassy.

Being an EFL teacher in a public university comes with accountability for decisions made and linguistic mastery. As such, being non-native speakers of English demands the participants be constantly searching for and making decisions about opportunities to improve their language skills. Their self-awareness made them take control of their language weaknesses and take action in their surroundings by promoting more authentic real-life language interaction opportunities that would benefit both their language competence and that of their students. They are aware that their monolingual context limits their chances to speak with other English speakers, which is

why all participants mentioned field trips and alliances with other organizations as ways to provide more English language practice.

Transdisciplinary Roles in EFL Teachers' Professional Agency

Byrd Clark (2016) explained that transdisciplinary approaches "envision alternative ways of thinking and doing language learning and teaching" (p. 4) and defined the concept as "the crossing, intersecting, and navigating of the in-between-ness of social structures and the subjective dimensions of everyday life" (p. 5). In the case of language teachers in this study, although all of them developed their profession in the same discipline, they navigated different roles and different ways to learn and teach the English language. Participants' intersections included teaching across age levels (primary school and higher education), administrative leadership, and community outreach planning and development. Their involvement in different settings fostered their agency since they were pushed to learn different ways to teach that eventually gave them a broader understanding of their community, their students, and EFL teaching and learning.

Four out of the nine educators divided their work between two different formal education systems, primary (K-6) and higher education. Even though their English language knowledge is transferable from one place to the other, their teaching methodologies and the administrative system differ markedly. Indeed, Brown and Lee (2015) described remarkable differences when teaching children, teenagers, and adults. He emphasized that each group possesses different intellectual capacities, attention spans, sensory input factors and affective factors (Brown & Lee, 2015). Gary, Rosy, Jaime, and David navigate between two different age groups daily, teaching adults and children. An overload of work while juggling their two roles directly interfered with

their agency. They admitted to not being able to take initiative and engage on campus as they would like because of their shared duties.

David and Andrés also navigated the in-betweenness of performing an administrative position (Head of Academic Department and Languages Department Coordinator) and a teaching position. On this matter, Stephenson (2011) explained how "responsibility for leadership is required of all English language teachers" (p. 7) as a means for meeting changing contemporary ELT challenges. She also mentioned an increasing emphasis on the importance of leadership in the field. Andrés' second master's degree in Educational Leadership speaks to this demand. A positive side effect of this involvement is the fact that administrative roles have given participants knowledge of "hidden" processes which result in their confidence to make important curriculum decisions. This crossing of roles truly challenged educators' positionings on their campus. They realized that even though their passion is teaching, the institution needed them to meet the needs of learners and other teachers by moving away from their teaching role. Their administrative role helped them understand certain ways of thinking and doing that otherwise would be invisible to them. They both felt a feeling of service to the community that moved them to accept this position.

Corporate EFL Teachers' Professional Agency

Kahn (2017) suggested that corporate agency is understood to refer to the interpersonal interactions and relationships that move teachers, more commonly in higher education, to act strategically with other agents so that their engagement with tasks incorporates a social dimension. One of these interactions is critical reflection in education, which may occur through dialogue as a form of transformation or liberation (Freire, 2002; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Increasing awareness of one's situation implies that dialogue and reflection

would guide you to move from lower levels to higher levels of conscientization (Freire, 2002). Even though in this study I never planned to measure the level of critical reflection promoted through our interviews, David, Miguel, Jaime, and Rafael explicitly informed me about the high impact our conversations had on their reflection.

In a later interview, Jaime admitted having moved beyond the least-aware level, where he had never questioned his professional agency before. David achieved an in-depth understanding of the challenges behind achieving professional agency in his context and proposed a more just scenario in which more dialogue and reflection on educators' professional agency should be included in the institution's policy. He suggested that similar conversations to the ones promoted in my research interviews may be a catalyst for the exercise of higher agency.

Corporate agency was vaguely mentioned in the participants' stories. However, they expressed their interest in having such spaces and even yearned for participating in any form of group that would join colleagues together. Performativity of educators may be one of the reasons why they have not taken the initiative to organize such a group. Performativity explains that teachers are demanded to perform and generate achievements in response to local and global agendas (Jarvis, 2007; 2008; Priestly, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). In this case, participants mentioned that they face demands to demonstrate students' linguistic improvement in a few months and that this makes them focus on having students communicate in English and meet the course outcomes as soon and as accurately as possible. This pressure makes them pay full attention to what happens in the classroom with their students and avoid any other responsibility that would potentially distract them from their goal.

Educators' busy schedules and work overloads, derived from their multiple roles and jobs, also prevented them from seeking meaningful collaborative spaces, as such spaces could

represent one more distraction from their individual teacher performances. Indeed, some of them mentioned their expectation for the campus to be a provider of any similar group.

Once a Language Learner, Now a Language Teacher

Speaking another language and studying and working in a public university in Costa Rica convey status and power. Speaking English, in the case of this study, provides advantages in relationships, communication, and networking, while studying and working in a public university requires expert linguistic knowledge and intellectual skills. EFL university teachers on regional campuses found status in their English competence and recognized the power provided by their workplace.

The status of being an EFL teacher. Contrary to discriminatory practices and discourses against NNESTs suggested by Holliday (2008), Mahboob (2013) and Jenkis (2017), described in Chapter 2, participants in this study negotiated their identities in relation to their social contexts where speaking a second language gives them a high social status. Miguel mentioned that being a non-native speaker does not affect his confidence as a professional. María said she felt quite confident about her role on campus. Jaime mentioned some insecurity about the quality of his English language skills but emphasized his confidence in his teaching skills. In contrast to multicultural and multilingual ESL contexts, the official and most spoken language in Costa Rica is Spanish. Further, the flow of immigrants to Costa Rica comes from other Spanish speaking countries, which reinforces its monolingual character. In this context, language instructors are multilingual, as they develop their teaching identity through the speaking of two languages (Mahboob, 2010), but develop their practice in a monolingual setting.

As a consequence of EFL teachers' higher status, their profession comes with a high degree of intellectual commitment to the community, the campus, and the students. In a sense, their

commitment translates into a call to constantly improve their linguistic performance and teaching skills. This situation explains how intrinsic challenges in the form of individually driven and perceived levels of linguistic proficiency, as explained by Braine (2010) put the most pressure on participants' professional agency. As educators in higher education, their evaluation of how well they have acquired native speaker forms determines their decisions about classroom practice and professional development (PD). One participant stressed his role in guiding students to speak the language well and not conform to survival communication goals only. Their interest in providing students with authentic language interactions with English speakers through field trips exemplified the struggle they experience in their monolingual context. Students, as well as participants, lack real-life interactions with other English speakers and are confined to classroom experiences.

As a result of their status as non-native speakers of the language they teach, participants reported limitations in vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. They felt that these limitations are a result of their lack of authentic use of the language in real-life situations outside the classroom walls. Kamhi-Stein (2014) noted that NNESTs language barriers may be the result of their overused academic language, which is often limited to teaching purposes. Participants identified their ability to effectively communicate through academic English as a source of insecurity. Unfortunately, they also mentioned that this has influenced their self-image as English speakers. Jaime, for example, felt insecure and frustrated because of his limited vocabulary and did not feel comfortable with his non-native situation. He said, "I know I am not a native and I wish I were." David mentioned his inner struggle to always be learning as a mechanism to prevent future embarrassment in front of his students. Rosy mentioned that she never feels confident and

that is why she openly tells her students, “I am a teacher not a dictionary.” They all compensate for any lack in their language skills by developing well-informed teaching methodologies.

In reflecting on their NNEST experiences, participants mentioned all six of the positive characteristics described by Medgyes (1994), claiming that: they provide a good learner model to their students; they can teach language strategies effectively; they are able to provide more information about the language rules; they understand the difficulties and needs of the students; they are able to anticipate and predict language difficulties; and, finally, they even mentioned that when confronted with students who had disadvantageous educational backgrounds, they can use Spanish to their advantage when facilitating classes. All these characteristics are the result of their previous experiences in their previous role as language learners (Medgyes, 1994).

The relationship between experience, confidence, and decision-making. For Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015), teachers’ experience might be called the “age effect,” which describes “the impact of having been around for a longer period of time” (p. 65). The more experience the educators in this study had, the more confidence they seemed to gain. This confidence translated into higher agency through personal initiatives to make classroom decisions, develop projects, and take administrative positions. All educators in the study affirmed that experience has given them more confidence. For Nolan and Molla (2017), “Teacher confidence is a critical element of professional agency” (p. 16). They further suggested that teachers with high agency may see difficult tasks as challenges to tackle rather than avoid and thus view these challenges as valuable opportunities.

Participants’ years of teaching practice has given them assurance and confidence that they possess the required knowledge of their subject matter. Miguel mentioned that he is aware of the connection between experience and commitment. The more experience he gained in the

institution, the deeper his commitment and his interest in constant self-actualization. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) explained that having experience allows teachers "to put things in perspective" (p. 66) and have a less dependent role. Participants have seen the successes of their students through the years. They feel they have control over their knowledge and students' performance. Their many years teaching in the same program allowed them to predict students' needs and potential challenges.

Experience gives educators a space to construct their own understanding of who they are, who they are within their campus, and who they are in their professional community. Buchanan (2015) explained that self-identification prompts teachers to take actions they believe align with their constructions. This is true in the case of Freddie, who has found a strong transformation after his eight years of teaching experience and clearly sees how lived experiences influence his plans for the future in his desire to continue working on the campus. Aligned with Mezirow's (1996) transformative learning ideas, the workplace learning of the participants is a process in which they used their prior interpretations to construct new or revised interpretations of the meaning of their teacher identity to guide their future action.

Even though educators have choices and feel confident about them, these options are shaped by relations with both the local administration and with those at the main campus, as well as their level of confidence. As explained by Jarvis (2006), individuals, in this case university teachers, are not able to fully exercise their autonomy since we live in rule-governed society. As a result, participants in this study sometimes talked contradictorily about their freedom to make syllabus changes. While some participants affirmed that they have all the freedom to change the syllabus, other participants claimed they were limited in this regard. Participants who felt more freedom over the syllabus had an administrative position.

Participants also explained that, on their campuses, status and prestige are gained through the accumulation of both experience and knowledge; they mentioned that educators who have taught at the institution for more years possess higher status and power. Experience, knowledge, status, and power are the attributes needed to navigate the challenges educators face in rural communities. Experienced educators are the ones who are consulted for major decisions and are the ones who control conversations during staff meetings. Participants also perceived it to be the case that only accumulated years of teaching experience and a PhD can provide this high status. As such, participants mentioned the strong voice with which those with experience and a PhD spoke on campus and noted their motivation to acquire that professional capital for themselves so that they too could speak up.

Social Structure and EFL Teachers' Professional Agency

Priestley, Robinson, and Biesta (2015) claimed that educators who exercise high agency are better able to respond in a meaningful way to new and unique situations in their surroundings. Indeed, highly agentic educators are capable of judgement in the here and now and have the flexibility that is needed in complex scenarios. They also share the ability to implement programs, which contributes to making teaching a meaningful profession instead of just performing a job (Priestley, Robinson, and Biesta, 2015). There is no doubt that highly engaged adult educators have a positive impact on their local communities and on their institution. A positive impact is highly valued in rural communities that are usually defined in terms of deficit (Cuervo, 2016). Hence, the professional agency of university educators on regional campuses has an enormous significance on the local landscape.

My second research sub-question inquired into how the rural context of participants' professional lives informs their existing and potential professional agency. To that end,

participants' stories revealed the direct impact their rural and institutional context have on their professional lives and on their professional agency. As Jarvis (2007) proposed, "we do not have perfect freedom in our life-world since there are a variety of obstacles and many other people inhibiting our spontaneity; we only have a relative degree of autonomy" (p. 21).

Structure and agency. Giddens (1987) referred to the relationship of structure and agency through his idea of the duality of structure whereby individuals produce and reproduce their social life. He understood structure as the rules and resources that worked as structuring properties which allow the time and space integration in social systems. To Giddens (1987), individuals' agency emerges from the rights and duties of social positions in the social systems. As such, human action is constrained by the structures. In this view, in this study, the participants' agency within the institution was shaped by the main and regional campuses' decisions that restricted their participation in what they considered was important curriculum changes. Even so, teachers were able to influence their students by making free decisions in their classrooms. However, there were also differences in their exercise of agency as two teachers were able to make radical changes to the courses they were teaching, whereas the other teachers recorded limited opportunities and kept replicating old teaching practices.

Giddens' recursive loop of structure and agency explains how structures exist internally and externally. At the internal level, individuals' embedded memories direct their actions while the manifestation of social action comply at the external level. In this life history narrative, participants actions could be explained as informed by their memories that manifested in their replication of their own learning experiences into their pedagogical practices during their novice teaching years. Similarly, the influence of participants' memories traces about their parents' call

for formal education during their childhood may constitute their current passion for their profession.

One practice that has existed in the participants' actions across time is the value of native speakerism. Maria mentioned how her students comments on her native-like communication skills made me her feel better teacher. Freddie also shared his idea on the pressures local teachers may experience "you may think you are not as good as professors that are native speakers, so you probably push yourself too much." As recorded, only two participants directly addressed their concerns about the false idea of expecting students to achieve native-like competence. These two participants expressed their change of perception about the matter in the last years. In this view, participants' experiences speak for Giddens' idea that social systems have patterns of social relationships that change over time. This change determines the interaction of social structure. Hopefully, the rest of the participants may change the value they give to native-speakerism in the near future in the light of the awareness of English varieties.

Through their narratives, participants highlighted other dimensions of power relationships. They shared their experiences when identifying a dominant group, in this case the administration on the main campus while they (instructors on regional campuses) saw themselves as a minority group. By self-identifying as “the Others,” rural educators acknowledged that there is an implicit recognition of social differentiation by which they felt excluded. Crucial to the understanding of professional agency is the way in which adult educators interact with this relatively small degree of autonomy associated with their location on a regional campus.

The impact of rurality on professional agency. Those involved in regional planning in Costa Rica promote the social and civic participation of all citizens. One of the ways they hope to accomplish participation is through making higher education accessible to as many people as

possible across the country. The Planning Program from the Ministry of National Planning identified six regions with development challenges that required governmental intervention to ensure the equal distribution of resources (Arauz, Schmidt & Tabash, 2012). As a result, public universities in Costa Rica are required to provide equal opportunities to all students in the aforementioned regions (Atencio & Brand, 2016).

Formal higher education is seen as a key to social mobility in Costa Rica, said Miguel. Having a degree from a public university allows students to move to a higher social stratum since it provides a stable income and recognition in their communities. Higher education in Costa Rica, especially on regional campuses, directly promotes social mobility (Caamaño, 2016; Padilla, 2018). Participants were committed to positively influencing the learning experiences of their students and to making teaching decisions that would have this effect. They mentioned their commitment to influence learners' linguistic achievement by making well-informed teaching decisions regarding assessment, class work, assignments, and field trips. Eventually, these decisions directly contribute to their students' success in completing their programs.

To secure students' program completion and successful linguistic competence, participants referred to the need to be well-qualified professionals. Atchoarena and Gasperini (2003) referred to this as a particular need of developing countries where higher education institutions not only require well-designed academic programs and a clear mission but should put emphasis on high-quality faculty.

Participants recognized the role of professional development in their constant search for growth. Their experiences resonated with Jarvis's (2008) ideas on the topic. For him, there are instances when professional development provides opportunity "for self-growth, career advancement and social development" (p. 156). Even though limited, participants' initiatives to

complete more degrees and participate in conferences and workshops speak to their interest in being a source of reliable knowledge and being seen as high-quality faculty. Miguel, Freddie, Jaime, and Andrés mentioned their desire to advance their skills through formal education. In fact, Miguel, Jaime, and Freddie are all enrolled in their second master's program. María and Gary insisted on their interest in participating in conferences as a means to update their knowledge.

The issue of geographic distance—between cities and rural areas, between the main campus and regional campuses, and between institutions in rural communities—is an important consideration in understanding teachers' negotiation of their agency in rural contexts. In this study, geographic variation was closely related to teachers' professional agency inasmuch as their decisions were determined by issues of mobility in their location. As noted in Chapter 2, Atchoarena and Gasperini (2003) mentioned how long distances from cities to rural areas usually affect many types of activities. In this case, long distances between regional campuses and the main campus and short distances between institutions within rural communities shaped how participants exercised agency. More specifically, campus location was both a benefit and a burden. Jaime mentioned that it was the close distance between the two institutions at which he worked, the campus and the primary school, that allowed him to move easily and engage deeply.

Rafael also mentioned that the short distance between his home and campus facilitated his mobility and participation on campus. However, the long distance between the main campus and all regional campuses turned campuses' location into a burden when participants expressed their feeling of being ignored by the main campus's administration. They discussed how the administration was reluctant to accept invitations to participate in official events on regional

campuses, and how the long distance impeded their participation in events held on the main campus.

Added to these statements, distance limited all participants' accessibility to both professional development opportunities and library material. Miguel mentioned that libraries on the regional campuses are smaller and have fewer resources and that borrowing books and textbooks from the main campus can take too long. He argued that specialized literature to teach certain courses, such as his Linguistics class, was not easily available. Taking up the challenge of access, Cuervo (2016) saw this unequal distribution of resources as a threat to social justice in education since this creates a gap of opportunity, where barriers stop rural agents (teachers and students) from achieving their best. Even though social justice goes beyond distribution of resources, this is a first stumbling block individuals in rural higher education face when they want to be something or become something. This reflects unfairness and reveals inequality in the system (Cuervo, 2016).

Jarvis (2006) explored the role of physical space in learning environments. For him, space plays a part in affecting individuals' experiences. Rural educators' participation in professional development activities was jeopardized by geographical distance. Their rural locations make it difficult to travel to the main campus or other close campuses and participate in the extensive list of workshops offered. In fact, Gary was aware of this disadvantage and reproached the unequal opportunities. At a local level, even though their campuses are making efforts to provide similar opportunities, they fall short in their initiatives. Participants mentioned they are interested in attending more workshops. On the Pérez Zeledón and Coto campuses there is only one conference organized for their specialization, and it happens every two years. However, even though they mentioned their participation in international conferences and conferences on the

main campus, their professional agency is negatively influenced by their limited budgets and the lack of funding opportunities to support their participation.

This lack of PD jeopardizes rural language educators' linguistic and teaching skills advancement and updating, as well as their opportunities to learn with others. Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner, and Bal (2005) addressed this lack by outlining specific challenges for Latin American higher education and mentioned the pressing need to offer opportunities to students and educators to ensure advanced skills that would impact national economies. Not having the same access to PD opportunities as faculty on the main campus represents a conflict with regard to the aim of equality in regionalization planning as explained by Arauz, Schmidt and Tabash (2012) and Atencio and Brand (2016).

Power in rural higher education: A call for association and recognition. Because of their lack of participation in important program decisions, participants in this study made strong demands about their need for association and recognition at the institution. For Cuervo (2016), this is a social justice issue, specifically when it "is strongly tied to issues of participation in the democratic processes in the construction of the purpose and content of education" (p. 103). Atencio and Brand (2016) referred to this uneven treatment not only of rural students but also of university teachers and demanded stronger institutional policies that would foster academic growth. Participants in this study felt they did not have any active degree of participation in the changes made in language programs. They compared their participation with that of instructors on the main campus, who do have a say and an active role in all changes and initiatives. Their relationship with the main campus administration is tinged with an awareness of the power dynamics, which Andrés expressed in terms of the local administration being "down" and the main campus "up."

Participants explicitly mentioned they are not involved in the decisions made in the Faculty of Philosophy, which is the faculty on the main campus that "owns" this major. Their agency in curricular decisions is limited to being a witness, one who is just informed about changes and is expected to follow new guidelines without having an opportunity to critically contribute to the conversations behind these decisions or object to them. It seems that educators on the main campus are the ones leading those faculty meetings where new ideas generate change. A feeling of invisibility characterized participants at these moments, during which they found themselves completely on the outside.

Structural context, in the form of history, socio-economic conditions, institutional ethos, and cultural patterns has influenced adult educators' exercise of agency. As noted in Chapter 2, Jarvis (2006) described this idea as "living in the world," in a complex world where it is difficult to isolate individual factors from their surroundings. The process of understanding agency within a structural context, in fact, is seen as a socially constrained process already influenced by social relations which, at the same time, are an outcome of power relations. This power also places the struggle for resources on the map since it recognizes the way in which relations between their professional practice and their institution are linked. In this case, participants perceived the main campus to be a dominant, imposing voice.

At the same time, as a result of their lack of active participation, educators received little acknowledgment of their value. This need for acknowledgment is what Cuervo (2016) defined as recognition. He explained that recognition is "the need for acknowledgment of different cultures and values, which form the core of dignity, self-esteem and self-respect" (p. 91). Participants expressed this negative self-identification when referring to the obstacles they might have if they decided to teach on the main campus. Participants seem to have created a hypothetical

representation of their reality where they are “the Others” from regional campuses. Participants’ interest in completing their PhD speaks to this thirst for recognition. This resonates with myself as the author of this work and as a rural instructor; I have also witnessed the prestige that comes with pursuing a PhD. Part of my interest in completing this degree is to earn recognition for the work we do on our regional campuses. Participants mentioned that having more faculty members with doctoral degrees would bring important research, knowledge, and recognition to their campuses.

Higher education institutional structure and teachers’ professional agency. Turning to policies at rural institutions, the university’s mission is to generate, share, and socialize knowledge, and to develop humanist professionals with a creative and critical attitude (Universidad Nacional, 2017a) on all campuses. According to this mission, the university intends to contribute to the democratic and progressive transformation of communities in order to promote a higher well-being for society (Universidad Nacional, 2017a). I see evidence that this mission is being applied in the current outreach projects that Gary, Rosy, David, and Andrés’ are involved in. More specifically, Gary, Rosy, and David mentioned projects that are aimed at vulnerable communities and that have expanded due to their success. Freddie and Miguel visualized their future involvement on the campus through projects that reach out to vulnerable communities as well. The institution aims to contribute to an eco-social and peaceful coexistence where the main focus is on social groups that are underprivileged or at-risk of social exclusion (Universidad Nacional, 2017a).

EFL teachers’ agency was influenced by the institution’s historical proclamation of humanism as a driving philosophy. This philosophical perspective directs higher education teaching and learning practices to fulfil the mission of a publicly funded university for all citizens nationwide

without any social stratification. This ideal was influenced by the Latin American revolutionary movement in the 1970s that envisioned an institution free of social segregation (Pochet, 1993). In contrast to Knowles's (1980) conceptualization of humanism that sees the individual central and there is virtually no attention to the socio-cultural context, this university pays close attention to the socio-cultural context and positionality (culture, gender, or class) difference of each learner. With a strong commitment, the institution has created a culture of humanistic orientation by pursuing students' personal fulfillment and critical thinking first so that they can commit and contribute to their country's development (Núñez, 1974). This perspective is a less individualistic and a more collective one. These principles shaped teachers' decisions, such as their commitment to be qualified professionals that should contribute to their surroundings, and teachers' feelings of empathy toward their students' disadvantaged backgrounds and challenges.

Although opinions may differ on this organization as an instrument for social equality and quality of education for the country, to some extent, the efforts made to reach out to students from rural locations speaks to its success. Drawing on this university's latest statistical report (Universidad Nacional, 2017b), from 2012 to 2017, funding for scholarships and awards has doubled, which is evidence of its commitment to reaching more students every year. Regional campuses have the highest percentage of fully and partially funded students; indeed, the Sarapiquí campus leads the list with 86% of its students receiving various types of funding, followed by the Brunca campus with 82% and the Chorotega campus with 71%. The university's commitment to reaching less privileged students can be seen in the number of students who come from geographically remote locations. To foster this intention, new residences on the three regional campuses were opened in the last five years. This initiative has provided more opportunities to prospective and current students from remote locations.

In the light of the above efforts, university teachers are in need of opportunities to direct their professional agency toward actions that reflect and support institutional trends. As a consequence, a humanistic focus that encourages a whole-learner approach determines university teachers' agency in their surroundings both inside and outside the language classroom. Miguel and Jaime indicated that their language teaching should be informed by notions of fairness and social commitment. They did not limit their teaching to the language, but, as also echoed by David, they mentioned they feel accountable for students' moral and professional growth. Gary and María went beyond linguistic knowledge and skills to mention the role of emotions and positive rapport in their students' professional growth. By taking this stance, they defied traditional notions of education (Freire, 2002) that focus on academic skills and are usually linked to university formation. Andrés, Gary, Freddie, David, and Jaime linked their agency to the need to initiate more programs on campus that nurture young adults' sense of self, identity, and purpose. Right now, all campuses offer a limited and similar list of programs. However, participants noted that there are powerful economic influences making those decisions from a distance, on the main campus.

EFL teachers' freedom to act in the classroom and make assessment and teaching decisions speak to the institutional belief in promoting autonomy in teachers' action. Andrés mentioned how he felt teaching on a regional campus benefited his agency in the classroom. Being the only Literature teacher on the campus allowed him to make his own decisions regarding textbooks, tasks and assessment. Miguel expressed that teaching on a regional campus gave him more scope for developing his linguistic competence and knowledge about processes in the language programs since he has taught almost 20 different courses.

Summary

Six themes emerged from the findings of this study. First, teacher-participants have common perceptions of how their EFL particularities had an impact on their professional agency. Participants linked agency and identity in the way they constructed self-understandings of what it means to be a professional on a university regional campus in Costa Rica. Second, EFL teachers achieved agency by adopting the role of lifelong learner, making the decision to never stop learning the English language and to be informed about the latest EFL teaching trends. Third, EFL teachers in this study navigated different roles in their communities and on their campuses. Some taught across age levels, others took administrative leadership roles in addition to their teaching, and others developed community outreach planning. Fourth, EFL teachers exercised their professional agency through unclear interpersonal interactions and relationships with other colleagues. Speaking another language and studying and working in a public university in Costa Rica conveys EFL teachers' status and power, however, this status is accompanied by a high degree of intellectual expectation. And sixth, the rural context in which participants work directly impacts their professional agency. In their institution, participants identified dimensions of power relationships that established a dominant group (the administration on the main campus) and a marginal group (instructors on regional campuses).

Overall, participants' professional agency is not individually exercised, in fact, their stories reveal how heir agency was constructed situationally through their past experiences as language learners and novice teachers and their current multiple roles in their workplace. Understanding teachers' professional agency on regional campuses matters because it contributes to the formulation of possibilities for action and the exercise of choice that better responds to particular situations in their surroundings and at their institutions.

In the next chapter, I present the concluding remarks of this study, and I discuss implications for practice and further research as well as the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

"…every in-depth exploration of an individual life-in-context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities" (Cole & Knowles, 11).

The purpose of this life history narrative was to understand the experiences of EFL university teachers who work on regional campuses and how the conditions on regional campuses inform their exercise of professional agency. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings and therefore address two areas: the perceptions of EFL university teachers of their achievement of professional agency and the social structure and EFL teachers' professional agency. What follows is a discussion of the major conclusions drawn from this research. This discussion is followed by some thoughts on the study's implications for practice, implications for further research, and limitations.

Professional agency, in this study, is the engagement of EFL teachers in making choices, influencing others, and taking stances on their work and identities to exercise their professional practice as individuals within a sociocultural context. As such, agency is a multifaceted construct that merges the individual ability to take action with intention and its manifestation and connection to local and global contexts. A psychological viewpoint understands agency as an individual property that influences teachers' belonging and EFL identity construction. Added to the idea of individual intention, a sociocultural perspective explains how teachers exercise their agency with others and under particular power structures where they do not have much control over social conditions and institutional practices.

Educators' professional agency starts in their early roles as language learners and develops throughout their careers. As such, EFL teachers' agency is not only individually exercised, it is constructed situationally and conditioned in relation to both their past experiences as language

learners and novice teachers as well as the current circumstances in their workplaces. Consequently, agency is achieved in concrete settings and through particular ecological conditions (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). This study acknowledged that individual stories of teachers enabled access to collective memories that illustrate the way professional agency is exercised on regional campuses in Costa Rica.

EFL university teachers' situational factors influence their professional agency, and this is demonstrated in their intentions to make tangible changes in their surroundings. Either to attain L2 students' short-term linguistic goals, to expand high-quality English learning to other levels of education, to reach out to vulnerable populations, to advocate for students' whole-learner formal education, or to help the communities by forming good professionals who would contribute to their socio-economic development, EFL instructors navigate their profession with multiple responsibilities. The multiple roles under which teachers exercise their agency include being a language learner, language instructor, rural educator, adult educator, administrator, department coordinator and outreach project developer.

The selective past recall of participants' stories helps EFL university teachers identify their strong sense of belonging and their language learner experiences. Rural and institutional belonging of educators is informed by being born, raised, and educated in the same community as they teach. Even though growing up as professionals in rural communities comes with limited opportunities, educators manage to be engaged and have active roles on campus and in their communities.

Goal-oriented practice characterizes EFL university participants' stories of their current professional agency. The pressure to see tangible results of their teaching in the form of students'

high English language skill is a desired goal. Teachers goals also make them accountable for taking initiative and stances regarding community improvement.

Participants perceived their agency was enacted in line with their future aspirations. EFL teachers visualize their active engagement with research and outreaching in both the near and distant future. Such aspirations were positive as they related to the linguistic development and welfare of students. Their aspirations to extend the scope of their projects and depth of their research were motivated by deeper belonging to the institution as they envisioned themselves working on the same campus for many years to come.

Research for this study confirms that, in exercising professional agency, EFL university teachers are required to make decisions and take stances within socio-cultural contexts that directly influence those decisions and stances. Teaching in rural areas, power differentials, and geographical barriers constituted challenges participants felt they needed to overcome in order to move toward better teaching practices. Exercising professional agency in rural institutions comes with social responsibility to assure that students have access to education that will secure social mobility through a university degree and successful linguistic competence that will provide them with better job opportunities.

Even though power differential pushbacks, in the form of strapped budgets and negative mental representations, interfere with professional agency, teachers demonstrate an awareness of their role in promoting equity and quality of opportunities for students' and the community's growth. In exercising professional agency, educators produce their own system of meaning by taking opportunities in their surroundings, pushing processes, and making informed plans for their future. With respect to the influence of geographical location, professional agency is exercised within certain limitations. Teachers' decisions about their professional development

and their involvement in curriculum planning are limited by their lack of access to the main campus, were more opportunities were offered.

In essence, EFL university teachers' unique experiences and knowledge function as individual affordances and resources for the practice of professional agency on their regional campuses. Research needs not only look at the teachers as individuals but to also locate them in their context as individuals and social entities that are mutually constitutive of each other. Teacher agency matters as it contributes to the formulation of possibilities for action and the exercise of choice. Teachers' professional agency prepares the way for new learning at the individual and community level (Priestly, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä and Paloniemi (2013) supported the notion that professional agency matters for the developing of one's work and work communities by emphasizing that through high agency, individuals learn the new knowledge and skills needed in their work and actively prioritize, choose, and consider what is important and worth aspiring to.

Implications for Practice

By suggesting a series of initiatives that foster the professional agency of pre-service and in-service EFL university teachers, I intend to answer my last research sub-question: *how might the voices of these adult educators suggest directions for the evolution of institutional policy and practice regarding professional agency in rural higher education?* This section outlines points that contribute to developing teacher agency initiatives.

My suggestions are informed by the participants' career experiences, and although their experiences cannot be generalized to all EFL teachers on regional campuses, they are relatable to them. Initiatives are suggested for both institutions and for in-service teachers. On the one hand, the suggestions for institution are informed by the findings obtained from participants' past

stories as language learners and early career teachers and include practices for both pre-service and in-service teachers. These suggestions consider the critical role that the sociocultural perspective gives to EFL teachers' rural working contexts. On the other hand, initiatives for in-service teachers are informed by participants' stories of the present and ideals for the future and the understanding of agency as teachers' ability to take action with intention.

Towards institutional support to foster EFL teachers' professional agency. To foster community and institutional belonging, it would be wise for the institution to include tasks and events that intentionally foster pre-service and in-service teachers' agency and identity construction. Participating and volunteering in events organized in their communities may help students to develop a strong sense of belonging, accountability, and service. Involvement of this type is a way to deepen their connection to the local community, be informed of specific context issues and thereby execute assertive action required to deal with prospective situations.

Identity is the convergence of teachers' roles, knowledge, beliefs, feelings and understandings that are socially, culturally and relationally constructed and maintained. EFL teachers see themselves from the perspective of people around them to eventually form a conception of themselves. To do this, they strategically collect different versions of themselves within their communities, choose strategies to adapt and resist/accept power. Through these actions and decisions, EFL teachers demonstrate their agency. As such, the importance of fostering EFL teacher identity lies in the fact that having a clear identity serve as a guide to help EFL teachers navigate and mediate their professional practice which potentially fosters their empowerment, emancipation (Mezirow, 1981), lifelong learning commitment, engagement (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013), dialogue with peers, transformation (Freire, 2002) and goal setting (Hitlin and Elder, 2007).

At an individual level, pre-service teachers could be guided to self-reflect on their identity by creating educational biographies and portfolios. These projects could be included in program courses and have the potential to encourage high levels of self-awareness and consciousness about practice. In a like manner, to build strong EFL teachers identity formation, it seems important to include classroom conversations about EFL positioning at the local and regional level along with conversations with other English speakers in authentic English-use settings.

Developing ownership of their formal learning speaks for educators' agency to act constructively to their professional growth. To encourage formal learning opportunities in early stages of pre-service teachers' formation, it could be important to foster involvement in academic events through active participation and volunteering opportunities in conferences, workshops, and similar extracurricular activities, and to offer an updated database with second language (L2) specific conferences and workshops available at the local, national and international level. These initiatives would promote their corporate agency as well.

Formal mentoring was one type of guidance participants mentioned they lacked and would have liked to have. Hence, while pre-service teachers could take advantage of a peer-mentoring program (e.g., fourth-year students mentoring first-year students), in-service teachers could offer formal mentoring to novice L2 teachers and open formal mentoring conversations on specific areas (language assessment, language teaching, and learning research).

Opening a space to share conversations about EFL positioning at the local, regional, and national levels and organizing book study groups to examine literature that extends the understanding of the debate about NESTs and NNESTs may nurture teachers' L2 beliefs and their affective factors.

In the case of fostering agency in classroom decisions, it would be important for in-service teachers to organize formal events to share current L2 practice, successes, and failures and to openly share information about budget and administration decisions at the campus and institutional levels. Also, offering workshops that foster understanding of whole-learner teaching and learning approaches would guide teachers toward concrete goals for students' proficiency achievement and providing mechanisms to support teachers' self-confidence and perceptions of success may be strategies to affirm commitment to the community, institution, and students.

Corporate agency among EFL university teachers could be encouraged through formal Communities of Practice (CoPs) organized around teachers' insights. Wenger (1998) defined CoPs as informal connected learning that reflects the pursuit of a common goal and social relations. Although a "true" CoP, as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991), would be organic, starting spontaneously and evolving over time, educational institutions could provide initial direction as is the case with the British Council training program in Madrid (García-Stone, 2019). CoPs have a vital role in learning, sharing and changing. In a similar vein, active participation in professional development (PD) events promotes collaborative work that boosts teachers' corporate agency. Participants in this study emphasized their interest in having more PD opportunities. Each campus, I contend, should identify and recognize gaps and initiate PD activities informed by teachers' interests and concerns.

Regarding resources needed, teachers may benefit from a database of local, national, and international online, blended, and face-to-face conferences, workshops, courses, and action research opportunities.

Finally, teachers' agency was influenced by their desire to empower learners and the community through projects. Consequently, it seems important that pre-service teachers

experience first-hand contact with local organizations to establish networks and later partner to find shared goals that contribute to their communities.

Suggestions for university EFL teachers to foster their professional agency. Drawing on the participants' past and current experiences and their hopes for a more active future for their profession, this section offers a series of ideas for teachers to enhance their agency. At the individual level, teachers would benefit from initiating spaces for self-reflection on their teacher identity in the form of educational biographies, portfolios, and auto-ethnography research, intentionally informing themselves about local events and happenings in their community that reflect on students' concerns and realities, self-reflecting on and being self-aware of their emotional responses to their EFL and non-native conditions, examining literature that extends their understanding of the debate about NESTs and NNESTs, and creating and sharing a database of local, national, and international online, blended, and face-to-face conferences, workshops, courses, and action research opportunities.

At a collective level, EFL teachers would be more deeply engaged if they offer informal mentoring to L2 novice and pre-service teachers, participate in uncomfortable conversations about EFL positioning at the local, regional, and national levels, organize informal CoPs where they share current successes and failures with other colleagues, participate in formal CoPs or similar groups organized by the institution, participate in peer classroom observations with other colleagues, identify gaps and initiate activities that engage themselves and their colleagues in their teaching practice, include in their course syllabus field trips that promote authentic use of the language, and establish informal and formal networks with local organizations to partner up and share common goals.

Implications for Further Research

In essence, this study inquired into the experiences of a group of EFL university teachers in order to draw broader understanding about theory and practice of teachers' professional agency in rural higher education. By using life history methodology, this research endeavored to listen to the voices of these professionals who possess knowledge as a result of their teaching and learning experience in this setting. Through this research study, I have shared experiences of teacher participants, who are EFL university teachers. It is therefore understandable that implications of my study I describe below, reside in the field of EFL teaching and learning, and in the field of higher education.

This study has provided information about how EFL university teachers exercise professional agency on regional campuses. This study seems to be the first to collect teachers' stories in the form of narrative research in order to portray how EFL teachers navigate their rural working context and their condition as non-native English-speaking instructors in Costa Rica. Even though the study portrayed stories that are unique to the participants, their local experiences illuminate the meaning of professional agency with regard to the present and future social standing of the participants' profession more broadly. In fact, this life history is not an isolated case since participants' unique processes and tensions are also part of a larger force where lessons learned in one setting might be at work in other communities in Costa Rica and even in Latin America and beyond.

Due to the limitations of a small qualitative study, I suggest that similar research be conducted with a wider sample of EFL university teachers in order to see if similar themes continue to emerge. Additionally, since this study was focused on specific participant criteria selection that included non-native English speaking adult educators who have worked on a

regional campus for at least five years and educators and who have passed the stabilization stage in their career cycle, I suggest that the participant selection criteria be adjusted to include native speaker educators and novice teachers, which would represent a larger variety of experiences. It would also be wise to diversify the sample to include teachers across public universities in order to counter the idiosyncrasies of a particular university and expand from an institutional to a national understanding.

This study offers a beginning step in the understanding of professional agency, but more work needs to be done to obtain a wider scope for rural higher education. More work in seeking to listen to and understand the experiences of university teachers in fields other than language teaching and learning would provide significant information on more rural contextual factors. Campuses represented in this study offer programs in Tourism, Computer Systems, Administration, and Farming that would provide a wider understanding of the components of professional agency. The significance of context deserves more attention in educational research and specifically in studies of professional agency.

Research comparing EFL teachers' experiences on regional campuses and the main campus in public universities in Costa Rica could also give a more complete understanding of EFL language teachers' experiences. Resonances and dissonances in their stories may provide a wider scope of understanding of EFL teachers' perceptions of their learner and teacher careers. In a similar way, research that targets identity perceptions of EFL teachers as non-native English speakers may impact understandings of teachers' exercise of agency.

Informed by participants' comments on the key role of the research conversations as catalysts for reflection, I suggest EFL university teachers engage in auto-ethnographic and narrative research practices that would promote self-reflection. Auto-ethnographic and narrative research

open up anecdotal and personal experiences to connections with wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Self-reflective research practice does not merely report the individual findings of the research but at the same time questions and explains how those findings are constructed and situated. Findings in this type of research are the result of processes of social interaction and construction that involve other agents and multiple settings that are worth analyzing.

Limitations of the Study

Like any other investigation, this study has potential limitations that may have influenced the final conclusions. Due to its qualitative focus, some of the key challenges include my personal biases, participants' memory when narrating stories, and the unintended generalization of findings. Conducting life history requires the historian to develop links to contextual backgrounds of the participants through a cultural and historical analysis. One way to address this limitation is by acknowledging my awareness of the need to scrutinize the wider social context of life narratives. Regarding the researcher's bias, it is predictable that as a human being, I have deeply rooted beliefs, values, and prejudices in the form of personal frames of reference (Goodson & Sikes, 2017). However, as I embarked on my research journey, I conducted a deep self-examination that gave me the clarity to understand how the phenomenon under study related directly to my own experience. Rather than replicating my experiences, this examination helped me bring clarity to my assumptions and bias as they emerged in my study so that I could put them in their proper context (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Another limitation was adult educators' memory. In a sense, life history depends on the stories chosen by the participants to be told. Based on the premise that memory is selective, remembrances selected and told by the narrators are memorable as they have gained their status

of events and have shaped a person's life (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Individuals have profound experiences and stories of many kinds, in this respect, just because these stories were selected to be told, they deserved our attention and a role in a life history account. On this matter, Cole and Knowles (2001) reminded us that these stories are not mere events, instead they are "structural self-images." Valuing these self-images was key when analyzing the meaning behind the data gathered.

Some researchers may find the idea that findings in a study cannot be generalized to be problematic. Nevertheless, drawing on the notion that there is no single truth, but multiple realities in the understanding of human behaviour, this study intended to capture the realities of nine adult educators who decided to become English language instructors on a regional campus. These interpretations of reality were valued as subjective and unique (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) as they acknowledged the "in here" positioning and reality in each educator's life. The particularities of these personal narratives were not directed toward being generalized; instead, they were collected in an attempt to promote personal and social change. The main contribution of this study was to share the understanding and meaning of professional agency from the perspectives of the participants and help them to discover new ways of understanding their life-course opportunities.

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Appendix A: Interview Areas And Examples Of Questions

Personal and career history
• Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? • What family traditions and beliefs were important in your family when growing up? • Can you walk me through the process of how you become a language instructor from your high school time to the present? How do you describe your days as a language learner? • How do you see your career in 5 years from now? Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your career life. What is going to come next in your life story?
Early experiences of being a university language instructor
• How did you decide to become an adult educator? • What obstacles have you overcome to support this decision? Can you describe a dramatic class that shaped some of your current decisions as an adult teacher? • Have you received important public or private recognition? How has this recognition influenced your career? In those days as a novice teacher, did you have a support group, resource or figure that helped you when in doubt? • What do you think was the impact of your teaching in your students? How do you value the worth of your past work? • What advice would you give to your novice teacher self now that you have gained more experience? • What experiences are worthy to repeat?
The context
• Why did you choose to work in this institution? • Have you identified any geographical, social or economic barriers in your teaching experience? • What is the role of the resources available in your institution and community in your teaching practice and professional development? What resources would you like to see in this institution/community that may help you become a better adult educator? • How would you describe power in this institution? How does this institution shape your decisions and practice as an adult educator? What are some institutional attitudes that have affected your work as an adult educator? • The concept of "The Other" refers to the identification and articulation of the power relations which serve to create and reinforce marginalization of rural communities. Have you ever experienced any identification of being "the other" (usually less) because of the geographical location of the institution you work at? Have you seen any difference between what happens in your institution and what happens in the main campus? Have you identified any segregation or different treatment? • What future changes do you see for the institution and community?
Issues associated with professional agency
• Do you feel respected in your teacher practice? How would you describe the sense of belonging in your present teaching position? • How confident you feel about your professional skills and knowledge? • Can you describe your teaching philosophy? • How frequent do you experiment with new approaches and activities in your classrooms? • How confident you feel about your making decisions in your work place? Can you describe some of those decisions that you recognized as significant? What are some of your biggest achievements as an adult

educator? • Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future that actively engages you in your profession.
Being a non-native English speaker and instructor
• How has been a non-native English speaker influenced your teaching, your professional development, your self-confidence? • What is the hardest part of being a non-native English speaker English speaker and instructor of this language?

INTERVIEW 2: Interview areas and questions

Personal and career history
• Which are some turning points in your personal and career life? • Which are some roles you have adopted in your life? Is there something you would do different in your personal life and career? • How have you learned from difficulties or disappointments in life?
Professional Agency
THINK AND LIST STORIES OF … (they can be as long or as short as you decide). -meaningful choices you have made in your profession. -how you have influenced others. - stances you have taken that have influenced your professional life. • How are these situations shaped by your personality or individual characteristics? • How has your social surrounding (interactions, social networks, power relationships, discourses) influence these stories? • How have these stories transformed through time?
The context
The challenges of higher education institutions in rural areas are determined by the characteristics of the region. One challenge is that professors' agency is perceived as an act of self-reliance and choice while systems, societies, economies and cultures are sometimes ignored. Rural educators' achievement of agency is influenced by a frame that marginalizes and shapes it as they are recognized as "the others". In this case, the concept of "The Other" refers to the identification and articulation of the power relations either at the local, regional or more global level that identifies educators that separates them because of their geographical location. What are your thoughts about these claims? Do these ideas resonate with your experience as an adult educator? Where do you experience dissonance or difficulty?

Appendix B: Reflexivity Journal

Before the interview	
Expectations	
Fears	
Anticipated events	
Unanticipated events	
During the interview	
What went well.	What did not go so well.
Learning points and take-aways.	Themes (feelings, events, pauses, gestures) for the next interviews.
After the interview	
Memo	

Appendix C: Private Documents

MY PROFESSIONAL TIMELINE

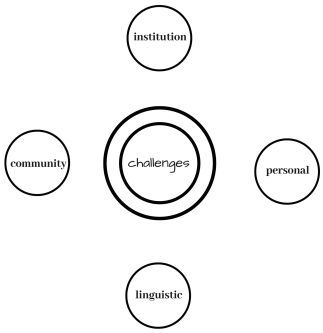
ACTIVITY ADAPTED FROM WOODWARD, GRAVES AND FREEMAN (2018). TEACHER DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME. PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS. NY: ROUTLEDGE.

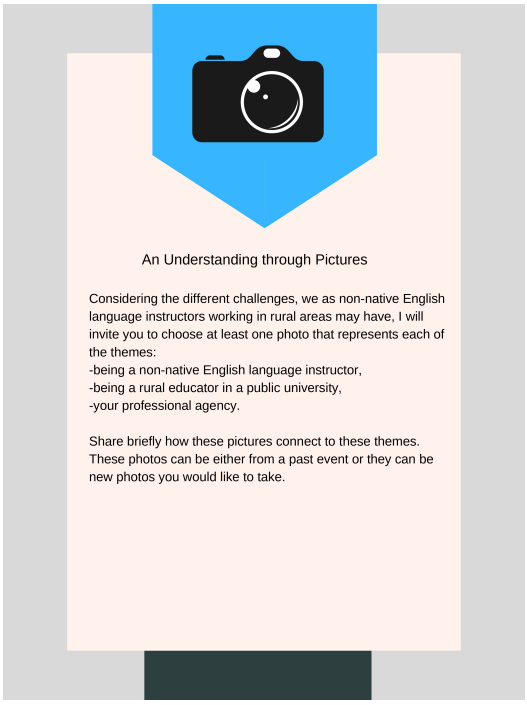
1. Think back over your professional life. Remember when you started teaching, when you may have moved institutions or teaching contexts, changed jobs and positions. Think back to major professional events (like advanced training, conferences, etc.) and consider where you are teaching now.
2. On a sheet of paper, draw a line to represent your career path to this point. You may wish to include some gradual climbs, high points, low points, muddled sections.
3. Label these with approximate dates and make a few notes on the reasons for the high and lows.
4. Decide how to subdivide the timeline for yourself, perhaps by years, teaching contexts, focal concerns, growth of expertise, or a mixture of these.

FACING CHALLENGES IN MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE

ACTIVITY ADAPTED FROM WOODWARD, GRAVES AND FREEMAN (2018). TEACHER DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME. PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS. NY: ROUTLEDGE.

Draw branches out from the elements and label them to represent what you feel are challenges of your professional life. Feel free to draw arrows between ideas that are connected, and to stand out elements. Add colour for emphasis, draw thunderclouds, or anything that expresses your experiences.





An Understanding through Pictures

Considering the different challenges, we as non-native English language instructors working in rural areas may have, I will invite you to choose at least one photo that represents each of the themes:
-being a non-native English language instructor,
-being a rural educator in a public university,
-your professional agency.

Share briefly how these pictures connect to these themes. These photos can be either from a past event or they can be new photos you would like to take.

Appendix D: Emerging Themes Table

	Professional Agency Temporality	**Step 1: Open Coding**	**Step 2: Narrative Coding**	**Step 3: Pattern coding Major/final Themes**
Professional Agency is Influenced by: Individual efforts, available resources and contextual factors	**Iterational past**	Growing up in the same community they teach, teaching in the same institution they studied made them stay.	Belonging (to the community and campus).	Rural and Institutional Belonging
		Not the desired major, enrolling in a public university, accepting a job without previous experience.	Taking opportunities and risks.	
		Going the extra mile, being a good student, commuting paid them with a good job.	Hard work pays back.	
		Family values, inspiration from professors,	The call for formal education	
		Going to university was assumed.		
		Though limited, there were opportunities to go to university.		
		Contact with English in childhood and teen ages made them more curious and receptive to the opportunity to be a language instructor.	NNES learning experiences	Becoming an English language teacher
		Easy subject in school.		
		It became challenging at the university. Frustration experiences, but they persevered.	Finding a passion.	
		They learned the language at an old age. They identified many linguistic barriers.		
		They found themselves as language instructors, but mostly as adult educators.		
		Loving their profession		
		Agency in the classroom. They have autonomy for classroom decisions.	Options for action.	Classroom Agency and Institutional Structure
		Go with the flow, staying neutral. Accepting administrative positions without previous knowledge. Declining job offers to stay on the campus.	Taking risks and opportunities	
		Make decisions to avoid brain drain. Provide more varied academic opportunities. Promote more culture awareness in the community.	Purpose of schooling in rural campuses.	

	Practical-evaluative present	Their linguistic barriers made them aware of the "academic" limited language they have. There is a need to be in constant learning. They identified a limitation in vocabulary.	NNES teaching experiences.	Beliefs and the affective factors behind non-nativeness
		Using the same course outlines and materials provided by former professors. Following what the main campus says.	Replication informed by past learning experiences (playing safe).	
		More confident to make classroom decisions. Confidence in their work makes them feel they can contribute and hence share their knowledge. They have changed the way they view teaching.	Transformation is informed by the experience they have gained.	
		Performativity at MPE. Time constraints. It limits participation in workshops.	Performing multiple jobs.	
		Dirty laundry. Claiming recognition and participation. Input regulation from main campus.	Power differentials	
		The role of the campus as a tool for communities' improvement. The impact of establishing research lines that benefit the community not their academic interests.	The impact of regionalization as a macro-level policy.	
		There are technological resources, they need technology competence. They want professional development in EFL.	Availability of resources	
		Generation gap. More confidence through the years. Experience is power. Gaining experience is a platform to share knowledge	The role of experience	The Relational Element of Agency
		Partnership with other organizations. No dialogical structures in the workplace.	Connections	
		Vertical/horizontal relationship with students/faculty leaders.	Relationships	
		Lack of formal mentoring. No collaborative work or spaces to collaborate. The need/interest to partner with international institutions.	Collaboration	
		Performativity at MPE. Time constraints. It limits participation in workshops. Management/administrative responsibility provides awareness of "hidden" processes.	Performing multiple jobs.	

		Participation in community projects.		Commitment to the Cause
		Vulnerable students (LGTB, indigenous, poor) make them aware of the community's needs.	More than teaching a language, guide future professionals (influence their future).	
		Get another degree. Participate in conferences. Do more research that would benefit others' teaching and learning, PD opportunities	The urge to be a lifelong learner.	
		Teaching is focused on the students' needs (emotional and social). The role of a server. See concrete achievement and results in students' linguistic performance. Making changes in the courses to see more concrete linguistic results. Questioning their practice when a student fails.	High level of commitment to students' learning process.	
		Make decisions to avoid brain drain. Provide more varied academic opportunities. Promote more culture awareness in the community. There is a need to provide more majors to the students in the community (brain drain).	Purpose of schooling in rural campuses.	
	Figurative future	Get a PhD. Do more research. Publish more.	Positive personal aspirations.	The Call for Academic Professional Development
		More PhDs on campus represent more positioning and prestige.	The impact of academic knowledge.	
		Formal mentoring, do research with colleagues	Collaborative work hopes.	
		Not being hired in a near future. Not feeling safe)	Fears	
		More programs on campus, bigger research projects, the institution will have more impact in the community	Projects for the community.	Empowering Language Learners and the Community through Projects
		International networking, exchange programs for faculty and ss.	NNES projects.	

Appendix E: Major Themes Description Table

Rural University English Language Teachers' Professional Agency	Temporality	Major Themes	Description
	Iterational past: There are elements of educators' current agency rooting in past experiences that play a role in their engagement in decision making. The more experiences, the broader the repertoire of responses to engage and act.	Community and Institutional Belonging	Belonging explains educators' affinity for the community and institution. This is rooted in the fact that they were born in the same community they teach. Educators' engagement is linked to their call for formal education.
		Non-native English Learning Experiences Informing Teaching Practice	L2 teachers have been through the same L2 route as their L2 students. They have first-hand knowledge of students' learning difficulties and successes as they were learners. Learning in a rural community adds up economic barriers and limited L2 interaction opportunities.
	Practical-evaluative present: The present accounts for day-to-day working decisions that are difficult to navigate and that influence educators' current engagement.	Beliefs and the Affective Factors	This factor explains EFL teachers' beliefs and affective factors in relation to their L2 identity. Ideas about status, judgement, accountability, fears and joys relate to these factors.
		Classroom Decisions and Institution Structure	This is explained by a paradox, on one side, the institution claims instructors should make significant decisions and take initiative, but on the other side, there are power differentials that limit their action (budget, voice, participation).
		Commitment to the Cause	This factor describes firm commitment to support language learners in their professional academic achievement and whole-learner approaches.
		The Relational Element	Relationships are either external or internal. External connections manifest with international and local institutions, organizations and people in the desire to expand students' and faculty's cultural awareness and language competency. Internal connections include learners, colleagues and authorities.
	Figurative Future: Professional agency is both existential and experiential. The future relates to long- and short-term aspirations in respect of the teaching profession. They are informed by a desire to amend the past and the present.	The Search for Academic Professional Development	Educators experience of the world in which they work make them recognize their need to foster their professional development. Their aspirations for the future include formal education and participation in academic events.
		Empowering Learners and the Community through Projects	Educators project their future toward their hopes to contribute to their profession and community by developing English language and community projects.

Appendix F: Recruitment Poster

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

To examine adult educators experiences of professional agency.In this study, professional agency is understood as the engagement of adult educators when making choices, influencing others and taking stances on their work and professional identities

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

To participate in at least 3 life history interviews.

WHO IS ELEGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Non-native English speaking educators who have taught for 5 years or more and are currently teaching English on a rural campus.

For more information on this study please contact

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

xxxxxxx, ER AL PhD (student) Researcher xxxxxxxxxx	xxxxxxx, EdD Faculty Supervisor xxxxxxx	xxxxxxxx, PhD Faculty Supervisor xxxxxxxx

Appendix G: Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:
xxxxxxxxxx
PhD candidate
Educational Research, Adult Learning Specialization
Werklund School of Education
xxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxx

Supervisor:
xxxxxxxxxx
Werklund School of Education

Co-supervisor:
xxxxxxxxxx
Werklund School of Education

Title of Project:
A Life History Research on the Professional Agency of Rural Non-native English Speaking Adult Educators

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of non-native English-speaking adult educators who work in rural campuses and how these conditions inform their achievement of professional agency.

The study is bounded by one over-arching question and four sub-questions:

1) How does the rural working contexts of adult educators teaching in post-secondary education interact with their condition as non-native English-speaking instructors to inform their professional agency?

a) How do adult educators' perceptions of their life experiences as non-native English speakers impact their existing and potential professional agency?

b) How does the rural context of their professional lives inform their existing and potential professional agency?

c) How might the voices of these adult educators suggest directions for the evolution of institutional policy and practice regarding professional agency in rural higher education?

d)How might these adult educators' experiences within this particular context suggest directions for the evolution of the theoretical understanding of professional agency of NNESTs in rural higher education?

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate altogether. You may also refuse to participate in specific parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in 3 life history interviews (this type of interview may take up to 2 hours), where just myself – the researcher – and you - the participant – will be present. The questions I will be asking in the interviews will act as a guide, however, they are open- ended as I am most interested in your stories, experiences and opinions and I want you to feel free to speak to as much or as little on the topics as you choose to. An example of the types of questions I will be using to guide the interview would be: *Can you walk me through the process of how you become a language instructor from your high school time to the present?How did you decide to become an adult educator?Have you identified any geographical, social or economic barriers in your teaching experience? How would you describe professional agency?*

You will also be asked to share any private document that you choose and consider may supplement the understanding of your experience.

The individual interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. You are free to request to see your transcribed interview script and to hear your recording if you wish. At this point you will be able to make changes to it before it is used as part of the research project. If I do not receive the request to review within the two weeks following of your interview, I will assume that you are satisfied with your interview.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Your name will be known to myself and my supervisors, in all notes and recordings you will only be referred to with a pseudonym. In addition, recordings and transcripts from the interview will only be available to myself and my supervisors.

Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio taped:	Yes: ___ No:___
I grant permission to use private documents that I choose.	Yes: ___ No:___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research. If any of the questions asked in the interview cause any discomfort or bring about any emotional distress you are more than welcome to skip them and are encouraged to do so. You are free to answer what you wish and to answer only to the extent that you wish.

The potential benefits of participation include reflection on personal and professional practice. We the researchers hope that the research findings will support future inquiry in the area of professional agency of adult educators in rural campuses, and more specific to this case non-native English speaking language instructors.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The only people who will have access to the information you provide will be myself and my supervisors. Your participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any point in the data collection phase and no longer want your data to be used

it will be destroyed. You will have two weeks following your interview to have your interview removed from the research, following that date the data will have already been applied to the study.

No one except myself and my supervisors will be allowed to see or hear any of the interviews and there will be no last names on the transcripts. The recordings will be deleted once transcripts are complete and the transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and any electronic files will be kept on a password protected computer.

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

xxxxxxxxxx, Principal Researcher
Werklund School of Education
xxxxxxxxxx,
xxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxx, Supervisor, Professor,
Werklund School of Education
xxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxx, Supervisor, Professor,
Werklund School of Education
xxxxxxxxxx

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at xxxxxxxxxx; email xxxxxxxxxx

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.