

A Systematic Review of Narrative Studies in the English Language Teaching Field in Latin America

Una revisión sistemática de estudios narrativos en el campo de la enseñanza de inglés en Latinoamérica

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This systematic review focuses on the significance of narrative inquiry in Latin American English language teaching research. Following an exploratory and descriptive methodology, we identified 198 publications in Redalyc, SciELO, and Scopus. PRISMA guidelines and detailed inclusion/exclusion criteria were used for selecting 38 articles published in 14 journals. A VOSviewer bibliometric map revealed connections between specific countries and keywords. According to the findings, narrative inquiry contributes to English language teaching research in four areas: pedagogical, methodological, ontological, and epistemological. Additionally, narratives emerge as a research lens and a pedagogical resource that can help teachers and students express themselves. As a result, this review provides insights into the perceptions and experiences of language education in the local region.

Keywords: English language teaching, Latin America, narrative inquiry, narrative studies, systematic review

Esta revisión sistemática se centra en la importancia de la investigación narrativa en el ámbito de la enseñanza del inglés en Latinoamérica. Se siguió una metodología exploratoria y descriptiva para identificar 198 publicaciones en Redalyc, SciELO y Scopus. Se utilizaron las directrices PRISMA y criterios detallados de inclusión/exclusión para seleccionar 38 artículos publicados en catorce revistas. Un mapa bibliométrico de VOSviewer reveló vínculos entre países específicos y palabras clave. Según los hallazgos, la indagación narrativa contribuye a la investigación en la enseñanza del inglés en cuatro áreas: pedagógica, metodológica, ontológica y epistemológica. Adicionalmente, las narrativas surgen como lente de investigación y recurso pedagógico que puede ayudar a profesores y estudiantes a expresarse. Así, esta revisión revela las percepciones y experiencias alrededor de la educación en idiomas en la región.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del inglés, estudios narrativos, investigación narrativa, Latinoamérica, revisión sistemática

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Introduction

It has come to our attention, after surveying the ELT research landscape in recent years, that teachers, scholars, and analysts have taken on narrative methods to explore different facets of English language teaching (e.g., innovative resources and pedagogical approaches), research methodologies (e.g., collecting qualitative data from personal experiences, which affects the way findings are presented), and perspectives from various stakeholders (e.g., studies including undergraduate and graduate participants). Thus, we can argue that narrative studies hold explanatory potential and offer insights into the particularities of English teaching and learning across different scenarios.

In Latin America, where English is a foreign language and linguistic policies are typically implemented via a top-down approach, narrative inquiries can be pertinent to English language educators and researchers (Banegas et al., 2020). Narrative inquiries can provide a voice for various stakeholders to inform more inclusive teaching methods and serve as a bottom-up form of pushback. To arrange the key findings of recent narrative research, this review focuses on Latin America, although we expect that the information gained can be used in similar English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) environments in other parts of the world.

This systematic review examines studies on narrative inquiry in the ELT field in Latin America published between 2007 and 2024. It emphasizes the relevance of this topic to the academic community, situates it within a socio-historical perspective, and synthesizes the findings of recent narrative research from an educational standpoint. Following the typology of research synthesis proposed by Chong and Plonsky (2024), this review adopts a systematic documentary analysis approach. In this case, the emphasis is on research, as the review examines challenges in implementing narrative inquiry and provides evidence-based justifications for its value in ELT (Macaro et al., 2018).

Martínez-Luengas and Méndez (2023) argue that narrative approaches have been used by scholars to analyze various aspects: narrative space at the levels of interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); sequential narratives, where events are placed in a logical order (Bruner, 1991); locally oriented narratives, which focus on authorized narratives and their local contexts; narrative frames as a valuable and comprehensive perspective on a particular field of study (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). For Aguirre-Garzón and Ubaque-Casallas (2022), narrative inquiry is a tool for documenting mentors' experiences from marginal places. The intersection of numerous shared experiences can have an influence on larger domains (e.g., policies, curricula, assessment), giving narrators the authority to make informed decisions after self-reflection of their practices (Holley & Colyar, 2009). Thus, narrative studies have gained relevance in the field because they provide natural and contextualized overviews of people's lives and experiences (De Laurentis & Porta, 2014).

This review analyzes 38 journal articles from Latin America, written by scholars based in the region. These studies place narrative research at the center of inquiry, reflection, and exploration in the ELT field. Through this analysis, we examine collective knowledge on narratives, highlighting both key trends and existing gaps. However, despite their growing use, narratives are sometimes perceived—especially by uninformed readers—as highly subjective forms of communication that lack academic rigor. This perception often stems from reducing narratives to a mere data collection technique, without acknowledging their broader methodological, cultural, political, and epistemological contributions to ELT research (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022).

In our view, narrative inquiry is more than just a research method, and we may learn more about how this research strategy affects other aspects of ELT by closely analyzing research on narrative inquiry

conducted in the region. Furthermore, in a social field such as education, narratives are important to gather individuals' life stories, interpretations, and experiences, which are essential for understanding human perspectives (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017). Through this systematic review, we also aim to provide a reflection on narratives from different perspectives: epistemological (a way of knowing), methodological/procedural (methods, techniques, and tools), ontological (socio-emotional issues and personal facts), and pedagogical (teaching and learning in the ELT field).

Method

This review follows a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014) in two main ways: first, it prioritizes the exploration of meanings and themes emerging from the articles, and second, it highlights interpretive insights rather than numerical evidence, organizing the studies into trends. The study examined articles published in journals indexed in Scopus, SciELO, and Redalyc to ensure broader access to relevant research. SciELO and Redalyc index numerous scholarly and significant articles from the region that may not appear in the

most frequently cited and ranked journals, yet still contribute valuable insights to the field.

Our research was guided by the following key terms, which included combinations and Boolean operators to refine the search:

(EFL) AND (NARRATIVES); (NARRATIVE STUDY) AND (EFL); (NARRATIVE STUDY) AND (ENGLISH LANGUAGE); (NARRATIVES) AND (ENGLISH) AND (LANGUAGE); (NARRATIVE) AND (TEACHING); (NARRATIVE) AND (TEACHING) AND (ENGLISH LANGUAGE); (NARRATIVE) AND (ELT FIELD).

At this point, we did not include “Latin America” as a search term because we wanted to be able to identify instances of studies in particular countries that the broader term might have obscured or obliterated. Figure 1 shows the studies identified and the quantitative reduction of data.

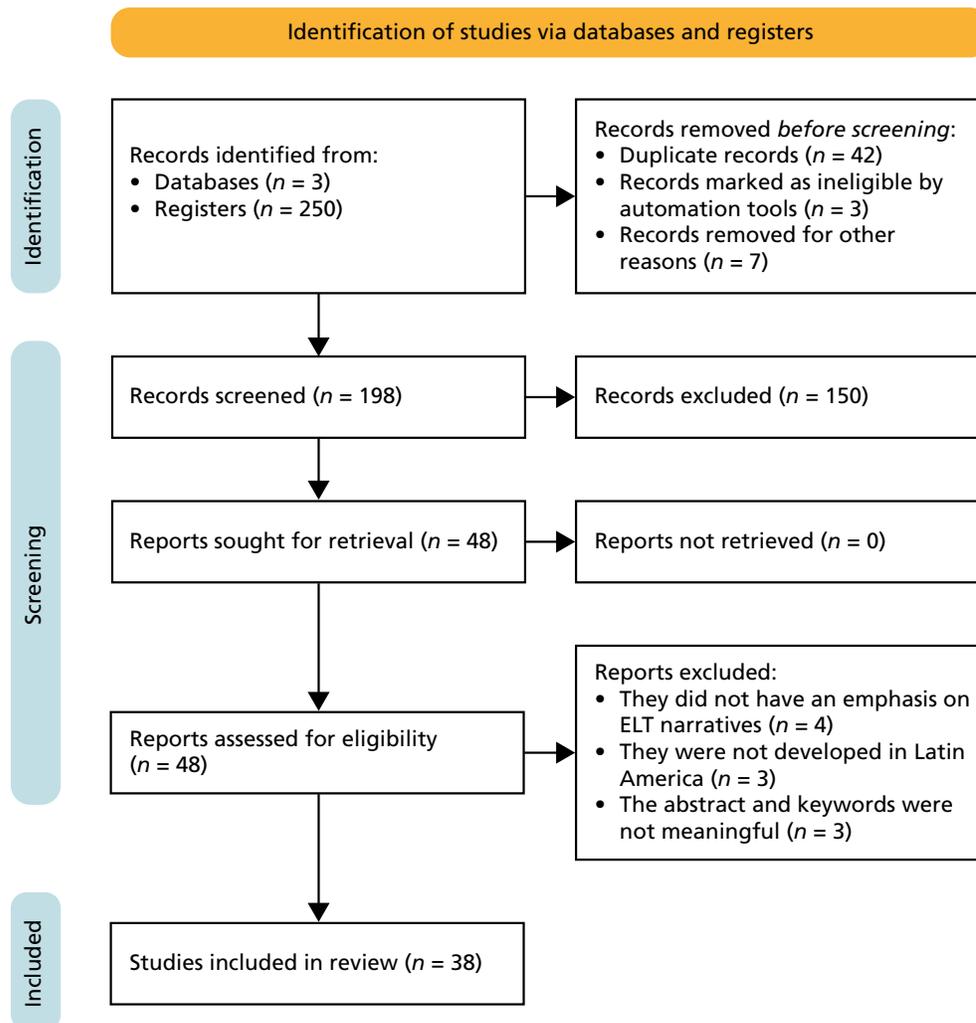
Data Analysis

We adopted three stages for data analysis, considering the procedure followed by Duque Salazar et al. (2024): (a) definition of the area of interest, (b) inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1), and (c) systematic analysis and socialization of results.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Articles with an emphasis on narratives and ELT	Articles without an emphasis on narratives and ELT
Articles developed in Latin America or referring to the Latin American context	Articles not developed in Latin America or not referring to the Latin American context
The abstract and keywords provided meaningful information	The abstract and keywords did not provide meaningful information
Articles written in Spanish, English, Portuguese, or French	Articles written in any other language
Articles retrieved from Scopus, SciELO, and/or Redalyc	Articles included in any other database or repository
Published between 2007 and 2024 to have a comprehensive body of recent research while keeping the dataset manageable	Published before 2007

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Systematic Reviews



Note. Adapted from “The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews,” by M. J. Page, J. E. McKenzie, P. M. Bossuyt, I. Boutron, T. C. Hoffmann, C. D. Mulrow, L. Shamseer, J. M. Tetzlaff, E. A. Akl, S. E. Brennan, R. Chou, J. Glanville, J. M. Grimshaw, A. Hróbjartsson, M. M. Lalu, T. Li, E. W. Loder, E. Mayo-Wilson, S. McDonald, . . . D. Moher, 2021, *BMJ*, 372(71), <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>. Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0).

We organized the 198 articles for screening into a table that included title, keywords, and abstract of each article. Each of us read these articles independently, and we met biweekly for four months to discuss the findings. At the end of this period, we had curated a list of 48 papers to be assessed for eligibility: two from Argentina, 13 from Brazil, one from Chile, 24 from Colombia, one from Ecuador, six from Mexico, and one from Panama. After applying the

exclusion criteria, we ended up with 38 articles for analysis.

Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of articles across various academic journals, which illustrates the diversity of sources contributing to the narrative research landscape in ELT within the region. The journal *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development* is notable for having the highest number of articles (15), indicating its significance in

Table 2. Journals and Number of Articles

Journal	# of articles
<i>Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal</i> (Colombia)	1
<i>Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação</i> (Brazil)	1
<i>Folios</i> (Colombia)	3
<i>Gragoatá</i> (Brazil)	1
<i>How</i> (Colombia)	1
<i>Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura</i> (Colombia)	3
<i>Praxis Educativa</i> (Argentina)	1
<i>Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development</i> (Colombia)	15
<i>Revista Electrónica "Actualidades Investigativas en Educación"</i> (Costa Rica)	1
<i>Revista Brasileira de Lingüística Aplicada</i> (Brazil)	6
<i>Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa</i> (Mexico)	1
<i>SciELO Preprints</i> (Brazil)	1
<i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i> (United Kingdom)	1
<i>Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada</i> (Colombia)	2
Total	38

exploring narratives within the context of English language education. Other journals, such as *Revista Brasileira de Lingüística Aplicada* (6) and *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura* (3), also play a crucial role in advancing the state of the art in narrative studies. The remaining journals, which feature one or two articles each, highlight the breadth of interdisciplinary interest in narrative studies, albeit with a less concentrated contribution. This distribution emphasizes the importance of diverse academic perspectives in enriching the understanding of narratives in ELT and the ongoing dialogue surrounding narrative methodologies and their implications for language teaching and learning.

Findings

General Overview of Narrative Research

We start by presenting descriptive aspects to provide an overview of the field based on the 198 initial studies and the 2007–2024 period. For this process,

we used VOSviewer, a tool designed to construct and visualize bibliometric networks based on aspects such as bibliographic coupling, citations, co-citations, co-occurrences, and co-authorship relationships, mapping connections and clusters among journals, research studies, and individual publications. The initial step involved examining the relationship between the “keywords” and the topic of “narratives in the ELT field.” Table 3 illustrates both the frequency of the main terms used in the studies and the connections established among them.

The most representative keywords include “English Language Teaching,” “Narrative,” “Education,” and “Language.” The intersections among these terms highlight that “narrative” is not a static keyword; rather, its recurrence across the maps indicates its central role in the field. The visualizations also provide an overview of the relevance of keywords evident in clusters and specific relationships among them. In addition, Table 4 illustrates patterns of co-authorship and identifies countries where narratives in the ELT field have attracted particular attention.

Table 3. Main Keywords Used in Narrative ELT Research

Keyword	Occurrences
Narrative	14
Human	8
Teaching	11
English (language)	6
Humans	6
Female	5
Male	5
Review	5
Human experiment	5
Education	5
Systematic review	7
Language	5
Narrative inquiry	8
English language teaching	32
Gender	5

Table 4. Co-Authorship and Countries (2007–2024)

Country	Documents	Citations
United Kingdom	10	104
United States	12	122
South Korea	5	94
China	7	21
Colombia	6	13
Iran	8	114
Japan	5	30
Thailand	4	70
Türkiye	4	28
Indonesia	4	14
Spain	4	22

The UK, the US, and several Asian countries regularly publish texts (e.g., articles, book chapters, reviews) on narratives in the ELT field. However, it is important to notice that some Latin American countries report significant results, particularly Colombia.

When considering narrative research in a broad sense beyond ELT, it is noteworthy that it has been explored primarily in disciplines such as social studies and the arts and humanities (see Figure 2). Other fields

(e.g., medicine, computer science, and the natural sciences) have adopted narratives as a valuable approach to inquiry.

Trends of Narrative Research in the Latin American ELT Field

To enhance descriptive and analytical clarity, we categorized the documentation into trends that highlight life stories, testimonies, and everyday experiences, all of which play a significant role in ELT and research. These narrative approaches have methodological and epistemological value in areas such as teaching and learning, data collection, pedagogical implementation, and document analysis. We also sought to strengthen the connections between the observed trends and their contribution to the wider field of narrative inquiry.

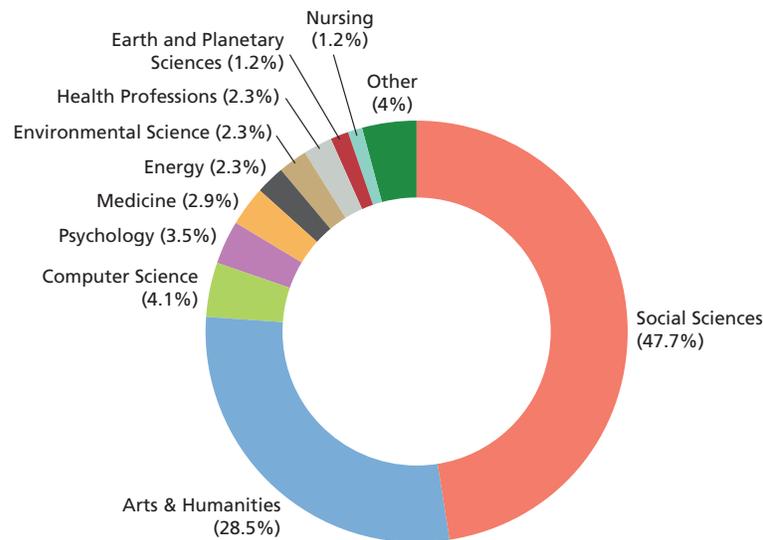
Our findings are presented in four main groupings: epistemological, ontological, methodological/procedural, and pedagogical. Each is discussed in detail, supported by quotes and a descriptive-interpretative analysis, complemented by our perspective as researcher-educators.

Narratives From an Epistemological Rationale

Traditionally, epistemology involves analyzing ideas such as truth, validity, objectivity, method, theory, hypothesis, and evidence. However, the decline of positivism and empiricism as the “only” truths for constructing social knowledge has led many academic perspectives to move away from this framework. Accordingly, research on the construction of social knowledge is shifting from the positivism and empiricism of scientific disciplines to a wider range of epistemological viewpoints, where subjectivity and the inherent importance of specific situations are significant (Gómez-Vásquez & Guerrero Nieto, 2018).

In this regard, ELT narratives address different themes, such as professional development (Mora et al., 2014), initial education curricula (Sarasa, 2017),

Figure 2. Subject Area of Narrative Studies (2007–2024)



and theories of critical media literacy/critical peace education (Aristizábal Cardona & Ortiz Medina, 2023). Similarly, narratives are portrayed as an epistemological possibility for research in education (Bolívar et al., 2001; Bruner, 1986). By following narrative inquiries as a way to combine environments, subjects, and experiences, scholars have tackled topics relevant to both education and ELT.

For example, in an ethnographic case study that used descriptive-theoretical narrative analysis, de Olivera Nascimento (2019) explored how the participants (undergraduate students, teacher educators, and public-school teachers) construct meaning (knowledge) regarding the ubiquitous presence of English in the academic arena. This shows how stories form, organize, and spread information, and provides insights into how we perceive the world and ourselves. Narratives also involve a higher percentage of research-oriented tasks, critical-reflective participation, and social commitment (Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022). This interest enables comprehension of the social subject as the main character

in a transforming event and prompts reflection on epistemologies.

Along the same lines, scholars in the field make an implicit claim for the ELT field to take advantage of narrative inquiries to not only share individual stories but, perhaps more importantly, to establish an epistemological stance where knowledge construction is mediated by narratives (Barkhuizen, 2013; Norton, 2013; Nunan, 2013). From this perspective, we identified a connection between narratives and epistemological issues, as life events and knowledge construction unfold over time. Aguirre-Garzón and Ubaque-Casallas (2024) state the relevance of their epistemological position(s) in encouraging them and others to express and challenge the beliefs they have taken for granted rather than to assert epistemic legitimacy or methodological validity. That understanding allows them to avoid the “knowing-known” subject epistemology (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2003), mainly present in the traditional and canonical objectivist research paradigm that has also dominated the subjectivities of teachers. Although narratives contribute

to education and comprehension, they are also inherently subjective, containing presumptions, opinions, and desires that lend them a subjective, potentially oppressive, and influential aspect.

Consequently, the propagation of narratives in the field is based on conceptual realities (theoretical or empirical) that are powerful for teaching, learning, reflective, and/or social processes. Constructs such as subjectivity, objectivity, domination, and even the interepistemic dialogue among narrative inquiry from a decolonial perspective (Posada-Ortiz, 2022) constitute a path to keep transiting through the stories and life events of the community involved. Furthermore, narratives bring to the fore the social construction of knowledge, not just through an individual's internal dialogue (as attested in intersectional narratives, where the individual's multiple identities overlap; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021), but also through their interactional component (narratives are explored and interpreted by an audience).

Ricoeur (1978/1999) argues that language cannot be reduced to a single process or method (as in the structuralist view in linguistics and literature) because, when we talk or narrate, we do not use language as an object but as a medium to convey meaning. In narratives, the relationship of the subject with the world and its historical past is intertwined with the imaginative variations typical of human fiction, allowing individuals to view themselves as historical subjects (Berkenbroc-Rosito et al., 2021). Moreover, implementing narratives in EFL classes is essential to help students gain perspective on contemporary events and deepen their understanding of the past. This becomes evident in the way EFL teachers incorporate historical narrative resources into their teaching practices.

Thus, within a framework of knowledge construction evolving through time, epistemology promotes narratives that reconstruct the past and present as a combination of potential futures. To add to this dialogue, narratives as an epistemological option also

favor the development of authentic knowledge in ELT teacher education (Sarasa, 2015), as they provide a real-life context for understanding concepts and processes, particularly during the teaching-learning processes.

In a study that used autobiographies to explore the beliefs of student-teachers in a teacher education program, Durán Narváez et al. (2013) found that past and present events shape the participants' beliefs. Indeed, the authors consider autobiographies a fundamental tool for recording events along a temporal line. According to them, autobiographies seem to be a useful tool for examining teachers' beliefs, conceptualizations, ideas, and behaviors.

To sum up, the epistemological rationale in narratives highlights the significance of addressing problematic human experiences (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018) and gives meaning to what has happened or is happening in the contexts (e.g., EFL classes), events, or activities in which communities are involved.

Narratives in the Nature of Being(s)

Narrative and storytelling are structural conditions of human existence and have a fundamental ontological approach. Hence, people and institutions give meaning to reality and its experience through different narratives of a historical, social, and cultural nature (Pavlenko, 2007).

Social reality is ontologically subjective since it is created, preserved, and given meaning by common beliefs, behaviors, and interactions rather than existing independently of humans. However, studies on this topic achieve objectivity precisely with language, as argued by Berger and Luckmann (1972). We also spotted a connection between EFL teachers' realities and professional identities; it can be deduced that (auto)biographies (as fundamental components in narratives) purport to be, in essence, primarily objective reflections to analyze an individual's personality, reasons, difficulties, and development of their achieve-

ments and failures in life by looking at a range of significant events in chronological order.

Likewise, Londoño Bonilla (2022) identifies biographical factors such as experiences in educational trajectories, representations of being a teacher, working conditions, individual and social motivations, and the potential these factors have to shape a different future by transforming reality. While the relevance of narratives in defining one's identity can be acknowledged, Moreno (2004) underscores the need to discuss "life stories"—accounts that cannot be fully conveyed without focusing on meaningful events or aspects. These narratives can take autobiographical forms or be expressed orally or in writing to an interlocutor.

As a contribution from reflections, we should say that life stories narrate experiences lived by the narrator, which are brought into the ELT field to be (re)interpreted by teachers. These experiences are remembered, interpreted, and carried out by the life storyteller (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2021). Hence, biographies, autobiographies, life stories, and so on, are directly immersed in the nature of being and self, where ontology brings out a condition of life, including the relations of people with events, histories, and their natural characteristics. Ontology studies "being and reality" as a narrative condition; thus, the events people experience are shaped by interactions with others and by life stories that unfold in certain contexts and memorable situations.

For instance, Cárdenas (2024) used documentary evidence (published issues, routinely gathered data, editing processes, and connection with editorial teams) and her personal recollections from her time as *Profile* editor to understand the viewpoints of authors and reviewers. This means that communities in the knowledge society are characterized by their ability to produce, disseminate, and exchange knowledge as a fundamental component of their existence rather than something that exists independently of them. According to Cárdenas, life stories can also be used to

pinpoint the preliminary, ongoing, and transforming issues that need to be fixed to preserve a local, reputable scientific journal for English language teachers. This systematic review benefits from the reflection of a journal editor, as it illustrates how research communities create trustworthy knowledge and how editors consider the way scholars should responsibly present, frame, and promote that knowledge.

Furthermore, the ontological trend within narrative research highlights another key factor: the participants' socio-emotional issues and personal traits, which are strongly connected to discourse practices (Souza de Oliveira & Fabrício, 2023). We, as narrative perspective researchers, contend that emotions and feelings are direct representations of the self (a sense of being), as social theory holds (Barbalet, 2001). Moreover, an individual's biography, life story, and other narratives are shaped by subjectivities and experiences that are regarded as concrete representations of reality. Individuals can use narratives to understand their position in particular social contexts. For instance, Clavijo Olarte et al. (2019) showed how teachers and students challenged the difficult circumstances faced in the early 21st century, especially those who work and learn in public schools with limited funding and resources in metropolitan areas.

Also, Ramos (2022) portrayed how the emotional experiences of English language teachers during their initial training and professional development significantly impact their academic journey. The author gathered information on emotions from written and spoken reports, individual interviews, screening sessions, class observations, and video recordings. The participants' emotions encouraged the researcher to ask about relational, genuine, and personal aspects. Then, from an exploratory stance, the narratives generated opportunities for reflection and self-awareness, which may allow the participants to transform their teaching practices or even their professional identity.

We argue that private notions, passing through human aspects and converging on sentimental assumptions, are important when handling narratives. Narratives from an academic community that have been expressed through personal/introspective conditions constitute another gap in this review. These narratives help people make sense of their experiences and knowledge, and they also address the fact that realities and concerns are not limited to one location, even though they are always changing, depending on the human aspects of life (Mendieta, 2013).

Narratives as a Methodological Approach in ELT Research

Among the various understandings of narratives that contribute to a comprehensive view of their role in ELT research in Latin America, one of paramount importance concerns methodological perspectives that advocate the use of narratives across different paradigms, methods, approaches, designs, and strategies. There seems to be an overlap in uses and understandings, and a plurality of voices encoded in the literature review, so that both the researcher and participants in a narrative study need to make an informed decision to clearly state in their narratives their understanding of the methodological aspects that characterize this sort of research approach. As suggested by Mendieta (2013), narrative research does not adhere to a single approach but encompasses a variety of methods and theoretical frameworks: “Narrative researchers make use of different methods and rely on different, though not necessarily competing, epistemological or theoretical ideas” (p. 140).

According to Sierra Ospina and Giraldo Gil (2020), narratives as a research approach allow researchers to interrogate the particularities of teaching contexts and the complexities of teachers’ subjective experiences. From that view, situated scenarios and personal voices are key to better comprehending the ELT field. In Latin America, narratives have been used for understanding

the complexities of teacher identities and revealing the lived realities of educators (Cruz-Arcila, 2020), as well as diverse life dimensions, including individuals’ worldviews, actions, decision-making processes, conclusions, and personal judgments (Trejo Guzmán & Mora Vásquez, 2014). An important point concerns how researchers conceive the relationship between their own role and that of the participants. As Aguirre-Garzón and Ubaque-Casallas (2024) explain, “we are not talking here about an information collection process but about a sustained process of co-construction of knowledge” (p. 79). In this view, what matters is not only the data themselves but also the constant dialogue and the collaborative effort to make sense of participants’ experiences.

For some scholars, narrative inquiry should complement rather than replace traditional research methods, as it offers unique insights into situated contexts. Seerig and Nicolaidis (2022, as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2013) argue that “narrative inquiry is relevant . . . because it enhances our comprehension of the inner thoughts of both teachers and students” (p. 190). Ubaque-Casallas (2023a) links narrative inquiry to the “no-methodology” approach, which allows for a more fluid and ethical engagement with narratives, where the focus is on co-constructing meaning rather than merely collecting data. Narrative inquiry represents a shift from viewing research as a data collection exercise to understanding it as a collaborative process that fosters deeper insights and transformative learning. This view not only enriches research findings but also empowers participants by acknowledging their agency and promotes ethical research practices.

Narratives have also been used as instruments (Mendieta Aguilar, 2011), whether in the form of oral, written, pictorial, and multimodal texts (Berkenbrock-Rosito et al., 2021). Moreover, they also coexist with complementary research instruments and techniques such as surveys, participant observation, notes, group discussions, recordings, recalls, and reflective

activities, among others (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018). Narratives are used as data sources to explore, among other things, the emotional landscape of teaching, which, as Ramos (2022) suggests, is necessary to comprehend teachers' development.

As some scholars have documented, narrative research in ELT overcomes a narrow view of methodological design. Castañeda-Trujillo et al. (2022) propose that narrative researchers do not simply gather stories; they should interpret them to make sense of their meanings and to unveil how they connect with research itself. Likewise, Ochoa Delgado et al. (2023) argue that this type of inquiry is hermeneutic in nature, and it involves a mutual relationship between the parts and the whole. Furthermore, de Laurentiis Brandão et al. (2023) argue that the flexibility of narrative inquiry enables the exploration of teaching and learning as it brings together different data sources, supports holistic analysis, values participants' voices, fosters reflection, and situates narratives within broader contexts. Taken together, these features allow researchers to have more informed insights into educational processes.

Despite their strengths, narrative studies in ELT also show certain limitations. The absence of a shared methodological framework leads to different interpretations, which can create inconsistencies or leave some accounts less firmly grounded. Because narratives focus on personal experience, questions of subjectivity and research bias inevitably arise, and these have often been spotted by more hegemonic perspectives concerned with traditional rigor. Another challenge has to do with scope: findings are usually attached to specific contexts, which limits generalization but at the same time acknowledges the importance of the local. Ethical issues such as agency and power relations also deserve closer attention. Finally, the potential of digital narratives and new technologies remains unexplored, even though they are becoming increasingly relevant in research.

Narratives to Nurture Pedagogical Practice

A key aspect highlighted in this review is the influence of narratives in language teaching programs and in studies conducted across different contexts in the region. Narratives are not limited to epistemological, ontological, and methodological considerations; they also promote reflections on teaching practices themselves. Through stories and the contexts in which they emerge, such practices can be strengthened, questioned, and enriched by pedagogical approaches that draw on narrative as both inspiration and method. Some pedagogical understandings derived from narratives are described below.

Some scholars suggest that narratives can serve as reflective tools for the development and professional growth of preservice and in-service teachers by fostering self-reflection, critical thinking, dialogue, and collaborative learning among educators and students (Aguirre-Garzón & Ubaque-Casallas, 2022; de Laurentiis Brandão, 2021; Huchim Aguilar & Reyes Chávez, 2013; Ubaque-Casallas, 2023b). Narratives may also contribute to language teaching and learning when teachers bring learners' stories into the classroom. Doing so can foster a more responsive environment that recognizes and builds on the students' diverse backgrounds and experiences (Ubaque, 2016). Besides, the possibility of understanding the reasons behind some students' resistance to learning English can inspire educators to think of effective and culturally situated teaching strategies (Rocha Pessoa & Plaza Pinto, 2013).

In our review, we also found that narratives (a) are valuable tools to foster inclusive and participatory learning environments (De Laurentis & Porta, 2014); (b) they allow individuals to recognize their capabilities and strengths (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2021), which in turn can promote a stronger sense of professional identity; (c) they contribute to understanding the teacher–student relationship and the socio-emotional dimensions of education (Rosas-Maldonado et al.,

2021); and (d) they can acknowledge the learners' diverse identities and experiences to craft inclusive and socially responsive educational practices (Bonilla-Medina et al., 2021; Nascimento, 2019). For example, Nascimento (2019) explored how the narratives of Black teachers might offer a critical perspective on classroom materials and methods to confront the ideologies that reproduce racism and exclusion in educational settings.

Aguirre-Garzón and Ubaque-Casallas (2024) propose another interesting view. They suggest that narratives can be understood as “pedagogical sites” where learners and educators problematize and share who they are, for instance, as professionals. Narratives also open the possibility to rethink research practices in ethical and political terms. For instance, they can welcome voices often marginalized within educational discourse. Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) also claim that narratives can enhance the views of teachers that inform their pedagogical philosophies and methodologies.

The review also showed that a comprehensive understanding of identities and experiences is achieved when learners and teachers share their stories (Caldeira Andrade, 2007). Therefore, narratives might be considered a bridge between personal histories and language learning. In this sense, they become a democratizing tool in education (Sarasa, 2015), one that can “liberate students and teachers alike” (p. 15) and revalue local experiences within broader global dynamics. Ubaque-Casallas (2021) argues that narratives can challenge instrumental approaches to language teaching and promote social transformation. Therefore, a pedagogical view of narratives not only discusses epistemic, methodological, and ontological questions but also opens up the possibility of interrogating local practices and unveiling lived experiences.

Despite this overview, there are still some challenges, such as the limited empirical evidence on how narratives affect learning outcomes, which makes it dif-

ficult to assess their impact beyond a qualitative stance. Moreover, even though they promote inclusion and critical reflection, the use of narratives in the classroom often depends on teachers' readiness to integrate them. Institutional pressures, rigid assessment schemes, and the prevalence of standardized testing might restrict the potential of narratives.

Another limitation is the tendency to focus on teacher narratives, sometimes overlooking student voices and the ways learners actively construct meaning through storytelling. Furthermore, although narratives challenge dominant ideologies, their transformative potential is constrained when they are not accompanied by broader systemic changes in language education policies and practices.

Discussion

After identifying the trends and gaps in narrative research in ELT in Latin America, we propose three domains that may guide future narrative research and practice in ELT.

Narrative Instruments

Finding a method to access life events through specific instruments—such as autobiographies, case studies, and life stories—is fundamental in narrative research. These instruments facilitate the thematization of the narrator's self-intuitive processes, the chronological reconstruction of stories, and the interpretation of meaning (Cadei, 2005). These distinctive characteristics give narratives a crucial role in meaning-making, particularly in shaping personal identity. Even when individuals recognize, interpret, and reflect on their experiences, these experiences continue to actively shape their lives as teacher-researchers in ELT (Ovalle Quiroz & González, 2023).

Narrative research interweaves cognitive, emotional-affective, and relational dimensions, creating a highly formative value that serves as a transformative tool for individuals seeking to make sense

of the world while constructing their personal and relational identities. This process fosters transformation, emancipation, and reflection, contributing to the development of a well-rounded individual. Various narrative approaches act as pillars supporting introspection, self-analysis, and self-formation. As Caldeira Andrade (2007) notes, since storytelling is an innate human practice from an early age, the narrative model often feels more natural and accessible than other methods for reporting experiences. Furthermore, Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2022) note how the academic community recognizes the value of narratives in allowing researchers to interpret and understand, from a critical perspective, the realities that shape and reflect social issues.

Narrative as a Research Process

In ELT, understanding narrative as a research process provides a robust framework for examining the complexities of language teaching. Narratives, in a broad sense, not only serve as methods for gathering data but also become dynamic tools that assist participants and researchers in co-creating knowledge. When researchers commit to narratives, they may learn about teachers' and students' lived experiences and uncover connections among pedagogy, context, and identity.

Narrative inquiry is also seen as a way to analyze the events that influence teaching methods. To illustrate both individual and collective identities, it offers a lens through which to explore the social and personal aspects of educational experiences. This supports the claim that in trying to create effective teaching strategies and promote fruitful research, one needs a thorough understanding of the larger context of language learning.

We might therefore notice that the narrative research process fosters reflexivity by inviting researchers to reflect on their roles and perspectives. This reflexivity creates an environment for collabora-

tive research in which participants' views are valued. When addressing the co-construction of narratives, researchers may contest established power structures and hold a more equitable representation of educational possibilities.

Furthermore, narrative research emphasizes the importance of context to define learning objectives. Scholars seek to understand how cultural, social, and historical factors influence language learning, challenging traditional assumptions that promote reductionist interpretations of specific contexts. This perspective not only contextualizes research practice but also assists researchers and teachers in creating pedagogical approaches that better suit the realities of our students.

Digital Narratives

The development of digital narratives in ELT requires further studies, analyses, and pedagogical implications, as it seems to be an emerging area of work. To put it simply, digital narratives utilize multimedia and multimodal sources (such as images, videos, and audio) to tell stories in educational contexts (van Leeuwen, 2022). The potential of incorporating digital components in narratives can result in more participatory and interactive experiences.

For instance, López-Gopar et al. (2013) used pictures and videos, as multimodal signs, to present ethnographic representations of indigenous and mestizo children in Mexico who were learning English in semi-urban and rural areas of Oaxaca as part of a critical ethnographic action research project. Their study clearly evidenced how this type of narrative can engage participants and communities.

Likewise, digital narratives, conceived as a research tool and pedagogical strategy in ELT, may take various formats, such as social media posts, infographics, images, videos, and podcasts. These creative and digital formats may offer options to present content in less-used modes.

Conclusions

After this systematic review, we can conclude that examining narratives in ELT highlights their significance as a useful teaching tool and research option. However, caution should be taken with how they are used, as a careless approach could diminish their distinctiveness. In educational environments, narratives can be received more meaningfully when addressed thoughtfully.

The field of ELT has greatly benefited from narratives, which have also influenced ways of teaching across a variety of contexts. We think they bring reflective resources to teachers, students, and the community at large to encourage critical thinking, self-awareness, and collaborative learning. Incorporating narratives into the classroom can also improve the teaching process by creating a flexible and pleasant atmosphere that acknowledges students' diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

We also highlight the importance of analyzing the role researchers play in narrative studies. The ways narratives are co-constructed, and their meanings interpreted, can potentially be influenced by the multifaceted relationship between participants and researchers. Therefore, reflexivity is required to comprehend the subjective experiences of individuals as well as the learning context.

In addition, the possibility of adopting narratives can transform education because they provide teachers and students with a sense of agency. Instead of simply repeating experiences, people who share narratives engage with interesting learning processes. Active students may express their cultural backgrounds and particular identities in the classroom. This consideration supports, on the one hand, the idea that narratives are essential to knowledge generation and meaning making within the ELT context and, on the other, that they are more than educational instruments.

We hence agree that the use of narratives in ELT is not simply a pedagogical, methodological, ontological,

or epistemological matter. It further demonstrates an ethical and political responsibility to fully understand languages, cultures, and identities in a range of educational scenarios. Researchers and teachers are invited to reflect upon the transformative potential of narratives in language education and the teaching of English in the region.

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