

The Metamorphosis

of Teacher-researcher Butterflies at the Master's in Language Teaching from UPTC

Daniela Alexandra Yepes Gonzalez

INVESTIGACIÓN
HUMANIDADES

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EDITORIAL UPTC

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TONGUE
Teaching on New Grounds Unexplored English Possibilities

Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas

Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas con énfasis en Inglés

Enfoque: Investigación
Área OCDE: Humanidades
Disciplina: Idiomas y literatura
Colección N.° 361

The Metamorphosis of Teacher-researcher Butterflies at the Master's in Language Teaching from UPTC
La metamorfosis de los docentes como investigadores de la Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas de la UPTC

Primera Edición, 2026
Versión digital (ePub)

© Daniela Alexandra Yepes González, 2026
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ISBN (ePub) 978-628-7965-05-8

Proceso arbitraje doble ciego
Recepción: junio de 2025
Aprobación: marzo de 2026

Hecho en Colombia - Made in Colombia

The Metamorphosis of Teacher-researcher Butterflies at the Master's in Language Teaching from UPTC / La metamorfosis de los docentes como investigadores de la Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas de la UPTC / Yepes González, Daniela Alexandra. Tunja: Editorial UPTC, 2026. 214 p.

ISBN (ePub) 978-628-7965-05-8

Incluye referencias bibliográficas.

1. Education. 2. Educational research. 3. Foreign Languages. 4. Identity. 5. Professional training. 6. Research training. 7. Teaching and training.

(Dewey 407/21) (THEMA CJ – Enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas)

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Libro de investigación

Citar este libro / Cite this book
Yepes González, D. A. (2026). *The Metamorphosis of teacher researcher Butterflies at the Master's in Language Teaching from UPTC.* Editorial UPTC.
https://doi.org/10.19053/uptc.9786287965058

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This book is devoted to Professor Sandra Yannet Silva Vivas; the woman who imagined this journey first. My academic mother and friend: thank you for eleven years of strength, guidance and light. This book belongs to your vision; your essence has shaped every page of this work. To the silence we shared and the path we took together—thank you for everything. This is for you.

Abstract

The purpose of this book is to present the results of a phenomenological case study that aimed to answer the research question: What do M.A. in Language Teaching alumni's lived experiences, represented in Multimodal Narratives, unveil about their teacher-researcher identity construction? The participants were four graduates of the Master's in Language Teaching program, all of whom work in different higher education contexts. Data were collected through multimodal narratives, phenomenological interviews, and a focus group. In addition, the principles of phenomenological reduction and member checking were employed to validate the data during the collection process. Afterwards, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data in detail and respond to the research question. The findings revealed that the participants constructed their identity as teacher-researchers and that this has been an intricate and dynamic process, represented in the interweaving of temporal dimensions, past experiences, present time, and future projections in the graduates' narratives. This connection between past, present, and future offers a deep understanding of how identity is formed and re-formed over time. These findings were represented through the metaphor of the monarch butterfly's metamorphosis, which allowed the richness of lived experience in the construction of meaning to emerge. This study has provided a humanized perspective on the construction of teacher-researcher identity. Based on the lived experiences of language teachers, it becomes evident that being immersed in the Master's in Language Teaching program has been crucial for enabling them to position themselves as reflective practitioners who analyze their work contexts and seek to transform teaching and learning processes through educational research.

Keywords: Education, educational research, foreign languages, identity, professional training, research training, teaching and training.

Resumen

Este libro tiene como propósito presentar los resultados de un estudio de caso fenomenológico, el cual tuvo como objetivo responder a la pregunta de investigación: ¿Qué revelan las experiencias vividas de los egresados de la Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas, representadas en Narrativas Multimodales, sobre la construcción de su identidad como docentes investigadores? Los participantes fueron cuatro egresados de la Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas, quienes trabajan en diferentes contextos de educación superior. Los datos fueron recolectados por medio de narrativas multimodales, entrevistas fenomenológicas y un grupo focal. Además, los principios de reducción fenomenológica y verificación con los participantes fueron utilizados para validar los datos durante su recolección. Posteriormente, se utilizó el análisis temático para interpretar los datos en detalle y responder a la pregunta de investigación. Los resultados revelaron que los participantes construyeron su identidad como docentes investigadores y que este ha sido un proceso intricado y cambiante, representado en el entrelazamiento de dimensiones temporales, experiencias previas, tiempo presente y proyecciones futuras en sus narrativas. Esta conexión entre pasado, presente y futuro ofrece una comprensión profunda de cómo la identidad se forma y se reforma a través del tiempo. Estos hallazgos fueron representados a través del proceso de metamorfosis de la mariposa monarca, lo cual permitió develar la riqueza de la vivencia en la construcción de sentido. Este estudio ha contribuido con un acercamiento humano a la construcción de la identidad del docente investigador. Con base en las experiencias vividas de los docentes de idiomas, se percibe que estar inmersos en la Maestría en Docencia de Idiomas ha sido crucial para que los docentes de lenguas se posicionen como practicantes reflexivos que analizan sus lugares de trabajo y buscan transformar los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje por medio de la investigación educativa.

Palabras clave: Educación, investigación pedagógica, lengua extranjera, identidad, formación profesional superior, formación de investigadores, enseñanza y formación.

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Introduction:

The Flight of a Lived Experience

Throughout the history of humankind, individuals undergo different experiences that shape who they are and the role they play within the world (Gupta et al., 2023). The ways in which those experiences are perceived allow people to make meaning of their own reality. Such experiences are vivid because they are retained and evoked in memory through pictures, sounds, movements, places, and gestures; all these sensations shape the significance that the world holds for a particular subject (Lenette & Boddy, 2013). When human beings look back through a self-reflective lens, those subjective yet powerful meanings shape who they become. The meanings of such experiences give rise to unique perceptions, ideas, and beliefs that become part of each subject's essence. In this vein, those experiences play a central role in the flourishing of identity construction, nurtured by the ways in which the world is perceived and meaning is given to life (Swanson et al., 2018).

Similarly, human beings interpret and communicate meaning through diverse modes of expression to make sense of themselves and their surroundings. These modes of meaning-making extend beyond oral and written texts. Human communication, therefore, entails a multimodal perspective in which words, sounds, images, and gestures are interwoven to enrich and nurture the meanings conveyed through language (Kress,

2008). This variety of realities, depicted through different modes of meaning-making, explains why lived experiences are subjective for each individual. In this sense, each mode of meaning-making (visual, written, oral, tactile, spatial, etc.) conveys meaning in highly particular ways based on individuals' backgrounds.

In the Master's Program in Language Teaching, a new phase emerges for students, as this graduate program opens a door to deeper understandings of the current roles of language teachers within educational communities. In this line of thought, students in the Master's program begin to develop a closer relationship with the research field. For instance, they take various seminars in which they are equipped with a wide range of tools. These tools enable them to gain deeper knowledge of language learning, conduct small-scale research projects to engage students, and reflect insightfully upon problems in particular contexts. These actions promote a more critical and active transformation among language teachers within the program.

Students are required to carry out a research project in which they give an account of their own experiential journey at the end of the Master's program. Consequently, the flourishing of teacher-researcher identity begins to be constructed and reconstructed. This study emerges from the research group 'Tongue', within the scope of 'Education and Educators' Formation'. It aligns with the M.A. in Language Teaching research line 'Education and Pedagogy of Language Sciences'. This phenomenological case study was carried out with four alumni of the Master's Program in Language Teaching, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of how teacher-researcher identity is constructed in this program, based on the lived experiences of a group of alumni and the insights they revealed. In order to have a rich source of data, multimodal narratives were selected as the main source for eliciting data and enriching participants' interpretations of the lived experiences related to the construction of their identity as teacher-researchers.

Moreover, phenomenological interviews were used to elicit insights from participants' multimodal narratives while avoiding the researcher's

assumptions about those narratives. Additionally, a focus group was held at the end of the data collection process to identify commonalities across participants' experiences in the context of the aforementioned program in Language Teaching.

Within this work, the researcher outlines the justification that establishes the main purpose of this phenomenological case study, as well as the problem statement in which this study is situated. Furthermore, the research questions and objectives are presented. The literature review sheds light on the gap in the literature that this research study seeks to address. As part of the theoretical framework, the main constructs relevant to this study are explained. Afterwards, the research design is presented, including the approach (hermeneutic phenomenology), type of study (phenomenological case study), context, population, data collection instruments, and ethical considerations. Then, the data analysis and final conclusions are explained in order to answer the research questions. Finally, pedagogical implications and areas for further research are suggested to deepen the understanding of teacher-researcher identity construction.

Rationale: The Call to Reflect

From a global perspective, this research contributes to build new knowledge in the field of ELT by offering valuable insights into alumni's lived experiences regarding the role of research in graduate programs focused on the teaching of languages in the Colombian context. As stated by Viáfara and Largo (2018), "For master's degree graduates and candidates, in as much as their education favored their reflection and research abilities, they were more prompt in transforming their pedagogical practices" (p. 116). Thus, these prior lived experiences unveil graduates' perspectives and challenges when facing the graduate program in matters of research practice, mainly in the central zone of the country. In this way, these programs maybe able to seek alternatives for those master's students who currently encounter difficulties when carrying out research, based on ELT postgraduate programs alumni's previous experiences unveiled thanks to studies. As previously discussed, research can be an empowering but

overwhelming journey (Zhang et al., 2022). Hence, stakeholders will provide support in order to engage language teachers as researchers.

From a local perspective, this phenomenological case study has a particular relevance to the setting, the Master's program in Language Teaching, the participants, and the researcher herself. In relation to the setting, it highlights the positive role of the Master's Program in Language Teaching in the flourishing of teacher-researchers in the national and regional contexts. Each one of the seminars proposed by this program allows students to reflect on their teaching practice from different perspectives, to become aware of the particularities of their classrooms, and to design strategies to overcome learning barriers. These actions generate active and transformative teachers at their educational institutions. This idea is supported by Chow et al. (2015), "teacher research is a process in which educators note 'problems' in the context of their own schools and classrooms and propose investigative methods appropriate to address the problems" (p. 22). In this sense, this program has a direct connection with the improvement of education in the quality of the teaching of languages. Many of its alumni are now teacher-researchers who are always empowering themselves and their students in all different schools regionally and nationally (UPTC Masters' program in Language Teaching PAE, 2022).

In relation to the participants, by means of the reflections of their past experiences, they understand in which ways they position themselves as teacher-researchers. In the words of Taylor (1989), "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable" (p. 27). Indeed, identity is an ongoing process that determines the role that individuals embrace within the world and the ways those subjects interact with others and their reality. These positive and negative interactions are pivotal when making meaning of the world, constructing beliefs, and making decisions; these features are a fundamental part of their essence as human beings and of who they are. Therefore, this study invites participants to embrace their past experiences and their meanings through the lenses of their senses, and to become aware of the way they