



Exploring the ELT Observer's Subject Positions: Tensions, Negotiations, and Contradictions¹

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Observation in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field is an educational practice historically located in the construction of what is known as a good English class and effective teaching. Most research studies on the topic have revolved around the role of observations in teacher education and professional development, guidelines for classroom observation, and observers' effective feedback; however, little attention has been given to the observer as a subject. This research paper shares results of the analysis of three ELT observers' narratives to cast light upon the ways observers problematize their subject position as observers of in-service English language teachers. Within a decolonial approach to relate to others, autobiographical narratives mobilized a series of reflexive and critical components that revealed that the enactment of the ELT observer subject position invisibilizes observer positions (others) that shadow feelings of discomfort at being in a position as mere tick markers without subjectivities and knowledge. The findings allowed us to conclude that observers' subject positions are pivotal to exploring their struggles and self-visions of a better practice of observation in which a more horizontal, relational, and humanistic consideration of the observer subject position prevailed. This study contributes to the ELT field by highlighting a more humanistic view of the subject who observes classes.

Keywords: autobiographical narrative, class observations, effective teaching, ELT, subject positions, observer

INTRODUCTION

Observation in English Language Teaching (ELT) has placed a historically practice situated in the paths of good English lessons and effective teaching practices. There

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exists vast literature on the multiple senses and usages of class observation dealing with relationships between teacher education, assessment, and teaching supervision (Nguyen & Ngo, 2022; Pastore, 2020; Iakovou, 2020; Daud, Dali, Khalid, & Fauzee, 2018; Merç, 2015).

Most research studies on the topic revolve around the role of observations in teacher education and professional development (Alsheri, 2018). In teacher education programs observation is a constituent part of the theory and practice relation. It has institutional support with observers (mentors) and mentees in which observation and feedback are fundamental to training pre-service teachers to become English language teachers and achieve effectiveness (O'Leary, 2020; Avalos-Bevan, 2018). In professional development courses the situation does not differ very much. In this case, in-service English language teachers rely on external help and certified observers to gain the most from observation and capitalize on opportunities for improvement. Also, observation can be conducted as part of an evaluation program implemented either by the workplace or the government to assess the feasibility and progress of an English National Plan (2014, the context of this study).

Although the previous usages are not the only ones in which observation takes part in education, we can infer from these usages one of the main senses given to it: Classroom observation is an objective of knowledge aligned with evaluation, assessment, and correctness (O'Leary, 2020; Iakovou, 2020). This generalized way to conceive classroom observation has spawned the idea of the existence of an objective observer: someone with a trained eye and who is well-qualified to guarantee objectiveness and a good observation. It is why literature is deep in guidelines for classroom observation, observers' effective feedback, handbooks for observation, manual for the observers but literature is scarce when it comes to the study of the observer as a subject, who is mobilising and who recognizes him/herself as an observer, giving to the observer subject position other conditions of possibility (Yuya, 2022).

The context of this study brings up the case of three ELT class observers that have been recruited and trained as observers then commissioned by a follow-up strategy of a National Bilingual Plan (NBP) in a foreign language context. It is usual to identify in these plan reports reiterations of English Language teachers as being in need to improve proficiency in English language and teaching. There have been hundreds of applicants for the observer position, which is a well-paid and a well-positioned activity. Despite this, the figure of the teacher-observer is not inserted into any report for better teaching practices. Our working hypothesis was aimed basically at these subject observers who are seen as instruments of control / power and sometimes play a role more as a vigilant, evaluator and trainer than as a peer. There are few studies on observers' positions, experiences, and points of view about classroom observation practices. Most of the literature has obscured the ways observers can problematize this subject position as fundamentally relevant to see other angles of classroom observation and themselves that have not yet been seen in many contexts (Shah & Harthi, 2014).

Consequently, the study addresses the following research questions:

- How do English Language teachers experience the observer's subject positions?
- Why canonical ways to observe have neglected observers' position others?

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to understand how the observer subject position in the narrated experiences of three ELT class observers influenced their negotiations among personal constructs about observation and canonical training guidelines.

Literature Review

Subject Position

Central to social critical studies is an examination of the logic of power/knowledge installed in practice and discourse to exercise domination or institutional order of society (Giroux, 1984). Inherent to institutional social order there are cultural and historical mechanisms of control to situate individuals within a number of (subject) positions which differ from each other by race, social class, gender (among other factors) and whose meanings are determined by discourse which in turn creates identification places (Hall, 1997, Foucault, 2002) There are some published works in ELT education that have used this category to understand how social roles/rules, power and positioning intertwined in ELT. To mention just a few recent examples: Chalak and Ghasemi (2017) focused on subject positions in advanced ELT textbooks' conversations, Yuya (2022) analysed how native speakerism influenced a Taiwanese Canadian female assistant language teacher (ALT) and Li (2021) who explores teachers' subjective position to give sense to middle school teaching. These works suggest that education is subsumed in practices of domination and inequality that merit serious consideration.

The incorporation of subject position in the ELT is relevant because it uncovers the nature of domination as well as the notion of positioning in the sense of power. To this respect, positioning theorists (Davies and Harré, 2007 and Langenhowe, 1999) have pointed out that "adopting a position" involves accommodation or resistance in the midst of dilemmatic struggles. In this case, the discourse of classroom observation and the way the observer has been delineated and subjected to certain roles, regulations, and behaviours regarding it will show inner layers of classroom observation and domination that literature has not been able to spot.

That is why, the decolonial aspiration of this project integrates the notion "subject position *other(s)*" to bring to the surface the three observers' subjective perspective about themselves no matter what the constraining features are. In the decolonial turn it is important to reflect upon colonial mechanisms that have been imposed on being, power, knowledge, and gender. The way observers problematize their subject position could lead to a better comprehension of English teaching practices because "The epistemic subject is an abstract one... without appearance but this subject has a clear, individualistic, and universal vocation..." (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 63-64). As an example, the observers may see themselves as being effective, interpretive, reflective, critical, and so on. However, the subject in the decolonial project invites the observers to analyse

themselves, to understand actions in "other" ways, in which personal epistemologies and pedagogies merge together to engage in an intrinsic analysis of their subjectivities.

Hierarchical system of observation

Classroom observers are also English Language teachers who are familiarized with observation --as all teachers-- since they also have been observed while they were pre-service teachers or head teachers in some workplaces in which observation is compulsory for temporary contracts or continual improvement. However, observers in these last situations got specialized training in which they learnt how to focus on information to fill in forms and give feedback to teachers (if the institutions generally have built a know-how, human team, and training to hire and prepare teachers as observers).

The observer: The observer is shaped, trained, and positioned as an "expert" in the functions s/he performs. The word "expert" was found and identified in different sources worldwide. In scope about the definition of expert as observer, it is precise to quote one of the rational statements on observing for improvement, Devos, (2014) "therefore, opposite to the observation for development, the participant relationship in improvement observations suggests that the novice always assumes the observed role, while the expert assumes the role of observer" (p. 26).

Several worldwide bilingualism programs have stated the importance to promoting strategies to strengthen the teachers' professional development as well as the teachers' observation practices, for instance in Brazil (Diretrizes curriculares nacionais para a educação plurilingüe- National Curricular Guidelines. Ministry of Education Brazil, 2020), in Turkey, the Bilingual Education into the local contexts (Ministry of National Education, Innovations, and developments in education system, Republic of Turkey, 2002) and, at a local view, there is a Colombian National Program: "Colombia Very Well- 2015-2025" (In the document provided by the Ministry of Education, they named the importance of having "experts" to help the ELT Colombian community [p. 4-7]). The task of the expert in the previous projects is to provide the appropriate tools for the success of the actions. Preparation for this expertise is fundamental and will help to form a subject capable of following precise and rigid guidelines to comply with the proposed project's objectives.

The trainer: In Wajnryb's (1992) words: "the task of the trainer is to help trainees understand the various processes involved in the teaching and learning of a language and the complex array of activities that occur in a language classroom" (p. 5). The observer's subject position needs a skilled and trained eye to perceive, understand, and benefit from observing the proceedings of learning/teaching. The subject position of the observer is produced by the power of experts (Foucault, 1982). This subject plays a relevant role against the performance of teachers' practices, the trainer talks that scaffold trainee teachers' understanding of teaching in a post-observation feedback session (Engin, 2013).

The observed teacher: Positioned in the lower place of this triad, the observed teacher is seen as someone in need of being observed to guarantee the effectiveness of the

bilingual program with all its mechanisms (total immersion model, co-teaching with a foreign volunteer, and resources for teaching).

This hierarchical positioning of subjects involved in Classroom Observation Practices (COP) is part of what Jordão (2016) has described as submission to colonial structures in which accepted imported methods to observe works better with subject positions' compliance. The observers enjoy the privilege of being pointed out as experts or authorities in the ELT field either for the position they occupy or the training they received from an international entity, but what happens in this hierarchical positioning needs to be problematized from a more relational perspective in which the verticality can be placed apart.

Classroom Observation Forms

Most publications on classroom observation refer to the observer as a tool that implements this practice. The revision of literature allows us to recall Merç's (2015) definition of classroom observation as an operative device of learning how instructional methods are implemented, how teaching spaces are structured, and how learners react to the classroom setting (p. 194). This comprehension, theoretically speaking, is related to the ideals that the practice of the observer must be systematic to avoid obtaining a distorted view of what happens in class and that its benefits are tangible: "It needs to be followed through properly, not something done once and leading nowhere" (Lasagabaster, and Sierra, 2011, p. 459).

Consequently, there are some class observation patterns the observers should follow. These patterns play a relevant role. Martinez, M. (2021) states the following:

The observation tools and patterns are important aspects of classroom observation. The effectiveness of the observations is related to some procedures the observer should carry out. The procedure: First class and Second class (Pre-class discussion- Class observation- post-class discussion- Follow up Process). This procedure offers one way of facilitating reflective practices in EFL teachers and encouraging them to engage in classroom observations as part of their training (p. 33).

Patterns in the forms are part of a complete system of agreements on the detailed components of an effective class. The observers should report to the entity (i.e., Ministry of Education, Coordinators, leaders, among others) what is observed including the characteristics about the EFL teachers' classes. In turn, results must be shown after the classroom observations (what is something to improve in class, the good aspects, the feedback, and the interactions among students, among others) and a report must be provided with all the insights that happen in a Class Observation (CO).

The observers are subjected to formatting patterns. A vision of language and its teaching is immersed in Observers' training and rubrics. The CO rubric exercises power-knowledge devices when the observer assesses a class; this format represents a fact to carefully follow. However, there is little information about how observers manipulate rubrics and how these confront their personal views on the COP.

Moreover, the observer should keep in mind some other ways emerged from traditional classroom learning, as Nguyen, Le and Ngo, mentions “The inflexibility (regular attendance, fixed study plans, classroom time, learning pace, etc.) has made it difficult for learners to pursue their education, especially learners with fulltime work or with unstable working schedules. (p.2). The observer captures these situations inside the classroom and s(he) is fixed into the CO rubrics.

Literature is replete with the observer role as a very important mediator between the patronized forms and the class observed itself; nevertheless, the primacy in the process relies on the adequacy of this form. What is to be observed in an English class has been formatted and the form agreed upon among different proposals. In the following chart we compare the structure of two of the CO forms aimed to observe in-service EFL teachers. The content is not exhaustive, but it provides a wide range of items to be observed as components of an effective class.

Table 1
Observation formats comparative table

Items in the CO Rubric/Format 1	Items in the CO Rubric/Format 2
Lesson Planning	1. Preliminary Questions. The observer asks the observed teacher about the class.
Class objectives. Clarity in the objectives of the class and the way they are addressed	2. General information. About the school and the class (number of students, average age of students, hours of the class, and date, among others)
Development of the activities: coherence, solvency, updating.	3. Class preparation. (The observers check/ask if the teacher has a class plan and if the objective is in accordance with the level of the students)
Pedagogical strategies used according to the characteristics of the class.	4. Use of the language. (Does the teacher use English to teach? Do the students use English? Is the use of English encouraged in the classroom?)
Materials and resources during the development of the topics.	5. Class development. Is the topic of the class clearly presented? Is there an introductory activity or warm up? Are there transitions between activities? (The observer notes whether the teacher promotes collaborative work and uses digital tools for such.)
Procedures for evaluation and feedback of the student.	6. 21 st Century Skill. The teacher develops activities that promote collaborative work. The teacher develops activities that promote the creativity of the students.
Class environment and student behaviour.	7. Evaluation and feedback. (The observer offers constructive feedback; the teacher welcomes different types of feedback using rubrics of it.)
Application of the rules of the class.	8. Materials and resources. (The materials used in class help to meet the objective and encourage the participation of the students.)
Strengths observed in the teaching / learning process.	9. Co-Teaching. The EFL teacher has an active role in the teaching and learning process.
Aspects to improve in the teaching-learning process.	10. Reflection time. Questions to be developed when the observation is done with.
Source: Colombian Ministry of Education. Educational Law 1278, year 2002. Observation Classes Model.	Source: Partnership 1550, 2017. British Council- Secretariat of Education, Bogotá, Colombia. Observation format within Colombia Bilingüe

As can be seen in the previous table, the first column shows a general structural rubric with must-use components to be observed with the aim of assessing in-service English Language Teachers for promotion within the career of teaching. While in the second column, a more detailed structure is seen as part of the observation strategy for in-service EFL Teachers (in a National Bilingual program). Elements of class observation from column 1 can be traced easily in column 2, but in column 2 the instructions given to observers could be of interest for understanding what the National Bilingual Plan is promoting.

Observers have an initial space to ask teachers questions about the class (see 1 in table 1). It means observers pose questions and observed teachers are information providers. It means that dialogue between these actors is not mandatory in a *stricto sensu* but it can emerge as part of observers' styles. In the same way, the observers are asked to verify if teachers' English language use reinforces a total immersion model and observers need to check if teachers encourage students' English language use (see 4 in table 1).

METHOD

Biographical Narratives

Narrative inquiry as a methodology is widely recognized and valued by researchers in human sciences and education disciplines due to its double attention to the individual and her/his story in such a way that individuals and researchers come to realize how stories-awareness generates knowledge. That is why narrative approaches provided by several authors have provided a framework to analyze: i. *Narrative space*, from three aspects: personal and social (Interaction); past, present, future (Continuity); and place (Situation) (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). ii. *Sequential narratives*. One event comes before another event in which a logical connection explains how one event causes another event. (Bruner, 1991). iii. *Narratives are locally oriented*. All local circumstances have their own canonical narratives. Each local event has preferences for a particular kind of story. (Bruner, 1991). iv. *Biographical turn* which includes the cognitive and reflexive dimensions of learning as much as the emotional, embodied, pre-reflexive and non-cognitive aspects of everyday learning processes and practices (Tedder and Biesta, 2009, p. 35). This last framework is a fertile terrain to study a subject positioned view of a practice. Another fact to consider in this research has to do with the ethical aspects. Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker affirm that "...data sharing also poses new practical and ethical challenges to the conduct of research with human participants". (p. 1). Ethical conditions in this research have been merged with the participating subjects and the reflective actions that are carried out.

Autobiographies

The focus of this research is to investigate observers' subject positions, a more autobiographical comprehension of this was needed to bring to the surface the narrated experiences of the subjects in the study. At the time of carrying out the autobiographical narratives, some opportunities and challenges appeared in this research due to power issues between researchers and participants. Consequently, some epistemological

assumptions were at the core of identity and negotiation: Horizontal Provocation, Ontological dissimilarities, and Power Relations.

Horizontal Provocation is an insight to give scope and a broader picture of the observers' narratives as well as autobiographical details during the practice of class observation. In a broader sense, "Horizontality is usually the construction of knowledge created by the intersection among subjects and, therefore, by the intersection of knowledge" (Pérez, 2012 p. 11). However, how can this horizontal process be carried out in a research project? The first thing is to be emphatic with likes, dislikes, and feelings of the participants who are part of the research. Researchers need to put aside this role to be the first one in exposing their struggles and doubts as observers clinging in an open and frank conversation, sharing feelings, struggles and thoughts to create conditions for other participants to open.

Ontological dissimilarities. The presence of some ontological dissimilarities is a premise in ontology. Ontology deals with concepts such as existence, being, becoming, and reality. Although the subject position of an observer is occupied by many, one observer is different from another one; this subject also comes into several position (s) which are in specific contexts and realities. As Vasilachis (2009) says, "It is necessary to review first the ontological and then the epistemological grounds of this type of inquiry" (p. 1). This foundation lies mainly in showing the importance of "being" during the research process and thus reflecting on the properties, qualities, or attributes of the ELT class observers.

Power relations. There are several times when negotiating is a fundamental strategy in guaranteeing participation as trying to decrease power issues to share control of who asks questions, what type of questions deserve more time and space, and when to change the subject or the pace of the conversation. As participants with different positions as observers, peers, and teachers, as well as having different forms to relate to each other, to be aware of power relations needs to be a permanent issue.

Narrative Construction Path

This research is composed of a transcription file of seventy-two pages, fourteen encounters with each one of the observers (participants), twenty-five individual encounters and three in groups (with the three observers). There has been a total of twenty-eight sessions with the participants and a thirty-page archive where the autobiographical stories are divided into nine chapters. Data collection was spanned for two years without following a strict schedule or format, in part because of the virtual encounters during the Covid pandemic and the tight schedule of the participants.

Instruments

The following instruments endeavour as tools used to collect, measure, and analyse data related to this study.

A provocative narrative. As a triggering instrument a narrative written in advance by a participant was shared with the rest of the participants with a 3-column structure as spaces to react and comment.

Autobiographical narratives: Using an open format, each one of the participants produced a narrative giving to it his/her own structure. Some general guidelines were suggested to spot the observer's subject position.

Transcripts of conversations: More than 15 recorded conversations were transcribed and organized in thematized files.

Participants

Tania. She has a Bachelor of Arts in modern languages and holds a master's in applied linguistics. She has 15 years of experience as an English language teacher in elementary, secondary, and higher education. As a teacher educator, she has worked in a well-known university in which she has had practicum and therefore a mentor role. She was also part of a team of observers in the Secretariat of Education of Bogotá, Colombia, observing in-service English language teachers.

Wilson. Has been an ELT consultant for over six years in the Philippines, Brazil, and UK. He has carried out many observations in schools and universities. He has had experience in both international and local education projects for more than 14 years. He is a well-known trainer worldwide; also, he has got a DELTA certification which certifies him as an expert observer and trainer.

Juan Manuel. He has been working as an ELT consultant, observer, and advisor for several years in universities, schools, and institutes in Colombia. He has participated in many class observations and was part of the language improvement strategies in the Secretariat of Education /Ministry of Education, Colombia. He is working right now in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia, as an English Language teacher, so he understands the local challenges in the ELT field.

Procedures

Phase 1. Setting the groundwork for the project

The first phase was developed during the first two weeks (from 1st of June to 15th of June 2020) and consists of initial conversations on the nature and possibilities of participation in the project. To achieve this, some virtual meetings were arranged (due to pandemic restrictions) in which presentations were shown to participants to explain the mechanics of the participation. This first stage was key to agreeing with some details and rules and to answer some participants' questions about their understanding of the research objectives, their expectations with the research and distribution of tasks.

Phase 2. Triggering narrative

As part of a toolkit for the creation of the project, an autobiographical narrative had already been created beforehand to nurture the problematization. For this phase, it was considered a fundamental piece to trigger participants' reactions. This autobiographical narrative consisted of 9 chapters (written between May-July 2019). It was framed and adapted with columns to facilitate participants' note-taking. This involves a narrated and reflected experience of Juan Manuel's and Tania's decisive moments, positive and/or

negative, in the professional career of being an observer in a chronological and locally oriented way (See **Annex 1**).

Phase 3. Formal conversations

This interchange of ideas and reactions at the initial stage of conversations included questions related to antecedents and biographical issues; later, these were part of the natural flow of conversations as reactions to participants' comments with questions or the clearing up of doubts. This enabled the participants to discuss topics that arose during the conversation. Some of these conversations were transcribed and subdivided into clear topicalized sections.

Phase 4. Producing your own narrative

Participants were asked to write down a narrative about their process of becoming a trained observer of other English language teachers. Although the triggering narrative had a type of format, participants decided to write down their narratives following a personal narrative style. In the case of Tania, a 6-page narrative was produced, in Wilson's case a 5-page narrative and Juan Manuel wrote a 3-page narrative. Considering the transcribed conversations, these narrators complemented their narratives by a selection of these conversations to complete gaps in content or give participants' own rationale about a particular topic.

Phase 5. Subjects position (others) beyond the commonalities

Although the narratives unveiled some commonalities among participants' experiences as trained observers such as: being trained, having similar backgrounds as teachers, having certified proficiency in English, and having a master's degree in ELT, our focus was to identify critical instances in which the observers problematized the imposed way to observe, that in this paper we understand as "the canonical way to observe." Also, we paid attention to conflicting moments in which observers were problematizing their subject position as observers or introducing positions others. For doing this, narratives were subjected to a grid of analysis in which color-coding procedures were applied.

Data Analysis

Autobiographical narratives were the central focus of the analysis complemented by para-textual information gathered from different sources (transcripts of conversations) in the phases previously described. The data analysis in this study was based on what Zacharias mentions, when conducting narrative analysis; furthermore, Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik "point to the need to pay attention to the principles of iterative, emergent, and interpretive". (p. 109) Pertinent sections of conversations were transcribed and while reading each narrative with the aid of the word-reviewing panel, incorporation of new information as "new comments" coming from participants' conversation transcripts were used to complement stories in narratives and to clarify doubts or contextualize personal information. Colour coding was also a useful technique to spot recurrent themes in relation to participants' rationale and reflexivity on their personal trajectories as observers (see image No. 1 below).

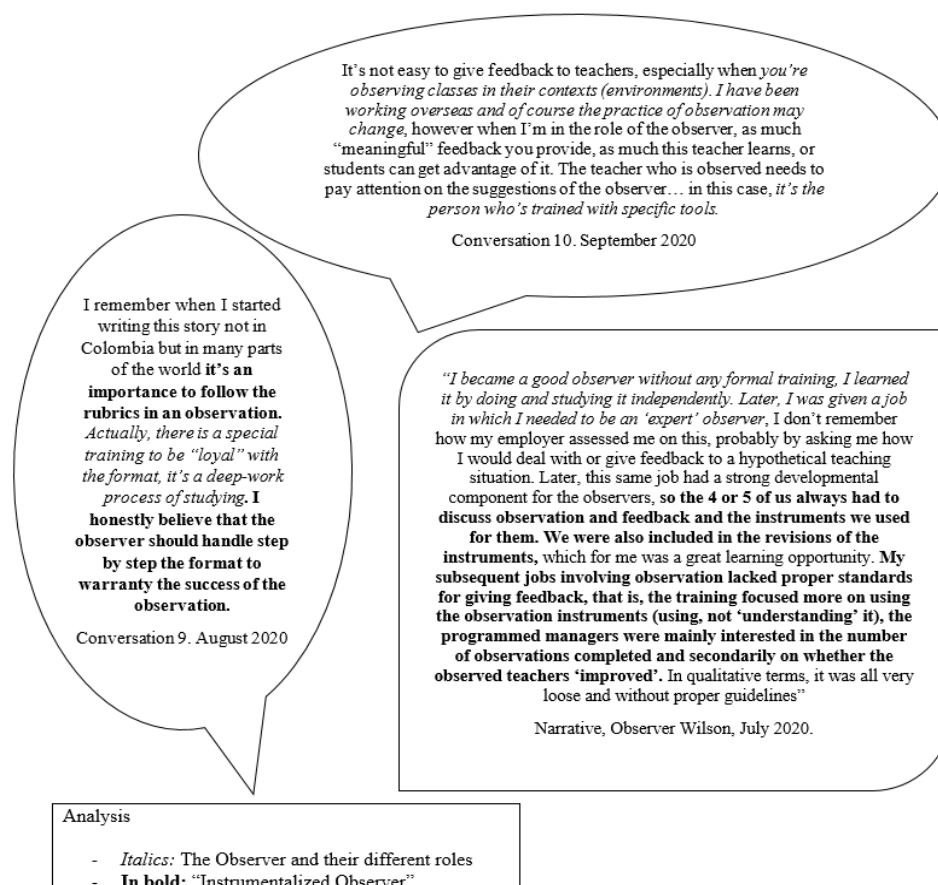


Image 1

Data collection excerpt from a narrative and script conversations with an ELT class Observer

We can see from this image the narrative of the observer Wilson, which is set in writing as a provocative exercise. An individual narrative thematic analysis was conducted contributing to the objectives and questions of the research. Then, using explicit positioning in autobiographical narratives, themes illuminated some participants' subject positions unveiling pertinent differences and commonalities in certain aspects of their subject position as observers. In the following section, participants' excerpts from narratives will appear in italics.

FINDINGS

Complaints about training providers

"I felt as if I were there just to put a tick, a machine..." (Tania)

In Tania's autobiographical narrative there are some important elements to be able to understand what it means to be an observer and the personal concerns involved in this process. For instance, her consideration of the other who is observed places her as an empathic and caring observer who understands the pressure of being observed no matter how "normalized" the observation practice in the teachers' professional life is:

I'm also aware that being observed might feel terrifying, although observations are part of teachers' professional life. When I'm told I'm going to be observed I feel afraid of being judged, even though I have taught for a long time. Besides, many teachers might have had negative experiences receiving feedback, since observers may hurt as much as a rude resistant teacher as the one, we confronted. [sic]

When it comes to talking about the practice of observation itself, she has a critical position on the way observation formats are decontextualized and based on imported approaches and realities; indeed, she thinks that:

One of the big issues of the ELT field is that we have been categorized by the western theories on specific lesson planning formats or approaches that have promised to be the rescuers. Such frames have mainly overlooked things that every schoolteacher has to face in our context: negotiation techniques, psychological counselling, emotional intelligence, substance abuse, hunger, poverty, [and] social injustice, among others. [sic]

The way she emphasizes these social and educational aspects makes us reflect upon her position as a context-sensitive observer. However, she faces the weight of duty as an observer, expressing her desires with hypothetical questions that reshape in her mind how an observation practice can be more just:

If I attend a classroom as a mighty observer with a list of regulated items, I will continue discrediting teachers' pedagogical practices. What if we better enter a classroom and negotiate with our colleague to describe and construct his teacher's identities and knowledges? instead of criticizing, judging, and evaluating. [sic]

In Tania's narrative, one of the most salient issues in the process of becoming an observer of in-service English teachers within the context of the study deals with the contradiction it entailed for her to be hired as a "pedagogical consultant". The meaning she supposed at first was quite different from the training she received. As consultants they "were told what and how regarding stages, procedures, goals, schedules, numbers, forms, and materials". Two of those stages implied class observation based on "what the policy considered was the 'correct' way to teach English".

In her view, instead of being someone with knowledge to share and discuss with observed teachers, in the sense of a consultant, she was reduced to merely an "eye" with which to complete the observation format, without any possibilities during her training for reflection, questions or discussion:

I remember the first training session for those observations, the trainers gave us a format where we just had to checklist whether the teacher accomplished or not items regarding lesson planning, target language use, strategies, interaction, XXI century skills, assessment, and resources. No space for drawing conclusions. Just at the end,

some reflective questions were discussed with the teacher, but the point was for them to see what they had done wrong in their practice and decide which element they wanted to focus on to adjust to the 'correct' way of teaching. I felt as if I were there just to put a tick, a machine.

This aspect that Tania pinpointed as something critical on training is also considered in Juan Manuel's autobiographical narrative in the sense of denouncing a de-contextualized observation practice, in which he declares:

... something that I really did not like is that the trainers do not know about our contexts (Colombian one), maybe they read the documents about schools and demographic information of these, but they have not been in an English classroom in Colombia ... that seems strange and contradictory to me; however, I feel good learning from all this, observing the local English teachers and being able to provide something to the academic community, but the training practices must be closer to the teachers-observers, reflective and also, they need to be more related to the real issues of our country" (Autobiographical narrative. Chapter 2 "Playing from local", March 2019) [sic]

This last aspect is also considered by Wilson who agreed on the need to have socio-cultural oriented instruments to match with observed practices and in doing so, he pinpoints that it is "a big mistake to import methodology and observation practices from the UK and US to be implemented elsewhere".

As can be seen, observers' reactions to training entailed a critical positioning of it in which personal knowledge about the observation practice itself helped them to assess positively or negatively some aspects of it. In fact, in this case, Diana can point out those dilemmatic components of training that contradict her vision of teaching and observation.

Affirming myself as a good observer

"My main struggle was on how to redact the comments section of the observation instrument..." (Wilson)

Wilson's autobiographical narrative shows a trajectory in which becoming an observer was a process in which formal training was not needed. The invitation to work as an expert observer arrived to him as a validation of his previous knowledge on the matter. However, the training itself gave him learning opportunities to review instruments and discuss with other procedures for observation and feedback:

I became a good observer without any formal training, I learned it by doing and studying it independently. Later, I was given a job in which I needed to be an 'expert' observer. I don't remember how my employer assessed me on this, probably by asking me how I would deal with or give feedback to a hypothetical teaching situation. Later, this same job had a strong developmental component for the observers, so the 4 or 5 of us always had to discuss observation and feedback and the instruments we used for them. We were also included in the revisions of the instruments, which for me was a great learning opportunity. [sic]

In the following excerpt, we will see how this learning experience allowed him to compare subsequent jobs in which spaces for discussion and analysis were limited to filling in the forms but without grasping the full nature of items on the instruments. This lack of “proper guidelines” was a matter of concern for him thus unveiling a personal struggle:

My subsequent jobs involving observation lacked proper standards for giving feedback, that is, the training focused more on using the observation instruments (using, not ‘understanding’ it), the programmed managers were mainly interested in the number of observations completed and secondarily on whether the observed teachers ‘improved’. In qualitative terms, it was all very loose and without proper guidelines. My main struggle was on how to redact the comments section of the observation instrument, this is key for example to form a discourse community” (Wilson’s narrative, May 2020). [sic]

As can be seen in this previous excerpt, the value he gave to proper guidelines as a condition for the creation of a discourse community brings to the surface the importance of knowledge underlying instruments for observation. When he admitted: “... *I’d only consider an observation instrument valid if there is a clear indication that it was designed based on hard evidence of what is desired to happen in the classroom. Anything other than this is heavily subjective,*” it gave account of certainties and truths constructed as part of the objective component of doing observation in education for teaching improvement. Even though he affirms he became a good observer without previous and formal training, the fact of being trained by different companies created confusion and doubts about guidelines for classroom observation. In his view, initial and continuing training on classroom observation must be normalized. And he considers it relevant to share his assumption about the excessive confidence in the capacity of teacher’s improvement from an observed lesson to another.

Moreover, one assumption that always struck me as ‘unreal’ has been the naive belief that from one observation to another the teacher will be able to demonstrate better teaching skills just because someone observed their lesson and gave them some feedback” (Wilson’s narrative, November 2020).

This assumption poses serious challenges regarding isolated processes of classroom observation in which feedback does not entail a positive obligation for improvement. There is a clear claim to modify observation including consultation for observation and teachers’ consent.

I am an observer but also a teacher

“Being in their shoes... I used to be a Public-School Teacher” (Juan Manuel).

In Juan Manuel’s narrative his position as an observer makes him recall his position as a teacher. Juan Manuel remembered some conversations held with observed teachers as significant episodes about complaints in relation to observation within the NBP. The way Juan Manuel reported on this illuminates his tensions with the role of the observer who must accomplish the task.

The observed teacher seemed in disagreement about the system and the observation I carried out; he felt exhausted from fighting with laws and norms, and he said they were no visible actors for the National Bilingualism Plan. I agreed on most of these, but the point is that I had to do my job, my function, my purpose of having carried out the observation in a well-detailed structural way, but I was thinking about the observed teacher's reactions since I used to be a Public-School teacher too. [sic]

The practice of observation for Juan Manuel is considered a space to understand other views on teaching, and understanding teaching as an embodied experience; that's why *being in their shoes* is a position that could relate to when talking and listening to teachers:

At the end of the observation practice, I realized the importance of analysing other views, the unseen, the unpredictable about classroom observation practices.... In my multifaceted view as Teacher, Observer and Trainer, I understood the pertinence of being a nice person, I mean... It is relevant to talk to the teachers, listening to them and of course being in their shoes". (Autobiographical narrative. Chapter 5 "A nice talk", July 2019).

One of the most frequent practices that happens to observers is identifying, knowing, and exploring the contexts which are going to be observed. The observation is not only an instrument /tool, but also the observer needs to understand the dynamics of the school, the classroom environment and of course know the teachers who will be observed. The observer plays an ethical role since (s)he also performs in that space of the school, of the classes and of the particularities that exist with the teachers. Juan Manuel details in an excerpt of his narrative the observation purpose and requirements of being observed through a conversation with an in-service English Language teacher.

I came to her to ask about my observation, and she asked me: "What would you like to observe in my class?" I reply, I just wanted to observe your great didactic, content, methodological paths, etc. in your class. She laughed, she said to me if I want to observe a great class, I could see it but next day. It means, by Wednesday. She invited me to be in her class but suddenly something awkward was saying: "I was going to be a great actress in your observation, I would be as the formats or rubrics require... I would be a nice teacher model..." (Autobiographical narrative. Chapter 8 "What to observe...Why", May 2019) [sic]

Juan Manuel was clear about the importance of sharing with the observed teacher what the objectives/purposes of a class observation were. When the observed teacher confessed to him that she could perform the requested role, it was a shock for him that made him realize that teachers have learnt to deal with the must-be, must-done practices already systematized and normalized. In point of fact, he asked himself if his previous observation practices had been completely real or how many observed teachers had done this before? He doubted his own qualifications (power) to recognize the validity of the observed. These aspects made him reconsider the value of authentic aspects in a class, the unexpected details as well as the local practices in specific contexts.

DISCUSSION

Having a closer look at these narratives allows us to discuss certain aspects of the observations and the singular ways in which participants experience this observer subject position. As was shown in this paper, most of the educational theories on classroom observation (O'Leary, 2020; Avalos-Bevan, 2018; Daud, Dali, Khalid, & Fauzee, 2018; Hişmanoğlu, M., & Hişmanoğlu, S, 2010; Lam, 2001; Merç, 2015) are in line with the idea of the observer as someone well-trained, objective, careful and meticulous to fill in an observation form, to gather information from a class and give feedback. Consequently, the canonical way to observe has placed the observer as someone who is obedient to the training and the imposed format/form of observation.

However, autobiographical narratives in this study illustrate how observers' training is problematized for different reasons. In the case of Tania, the training is a very exhausting experience in which the industrialized model of input and output made her feel as if she were a machine, keeping a watchful eye but ignoring her as a source of knowledge to interchange ideas. With these complaints, we cannot fail to notice an experience of dehumanization in the ELT classroom observation practices. There is a tension within the role of observers which is unseen / ignored. The ELT observers are not seen in the data of the class observation analysis. Their feelings, emotions, and points of view have not been stated while this practice has been implemented. The observers' attitudes and values are not expressed in the rubrics, forms, or data at the time of giving a result; it means little information about the observers' lives has been provided in bilingualism plans/programs or when a strategy such as a classroom observation is carried out.

The dehumanization of the observers in the ELT classroom observation practice also deals with the primacy of the observers' eyes. It seems that the observation system places an observer in a machine-like position that needs to observe everything as if s/he were a mechanism of control without consideration of subject positions (others), their wonders, expectations, and voices. This means that the observation practice is still governed by the visual canon of a hegemonic thought process.

There is also an important aspect to discuss in relation to the use of training in Wilson's narrative. His validation of training performance sessions whose guidelines were proper to satisfy doubts in relation to the completion of format observations brings to the surface that not all training sessions include spaces for interaction with other peers, which he noted with appreciation. In fact, it is worth noting that Wilson's background as a teacher who earned his credentials for teaching through CELTA and DELTA courses made him more open to training sessions than Tania and Juan Manuel, whose preparation as teachers was obtained in their Bachelor of Arts in English teaching degree program.

Another angle to consider is the hierarchy-power relations as an observer towards the observed teacher. In some conversations among observers, it was evident that the observer is "superior" to the observed teacher, either by her/his credentials, the validation of other entities, by culture and/or other situations; For instance, Italian teacher trainees conceive assessment, and agree how important the technical and

practical aspects of the assessment are: “The study confirms that there is an urgent need to invest in teachers’ judgment, training it up through educational and professional programs focusing sharply on assessment and through internal and external moderation networks” (Pastore, 2020, p. 226).

Many of the ELT observers do not like to see each other more than the English teachers (in the case of Tania and Juan Manuel); however, there are tensions of power relations when the observation is carried out in English language classes. This is another uncertainty that orbits the position of the observers.

Although narratives showed that participants agreed on the importance of classroom observation for education, acknowledging that observers occupy a key place in the hierarchical organization of observation practices in which they are constructed as “expert teachers”, some of them were claiming other types of relationalities not only with the contracting institution but also with observed teachers. Power issues are mixed in with this observation practice. At the institutional level, the supervision of observers is part of a schema in this National Bilingualism Plan in which observers must report to the entity (i.e., Ministry of Education or Secretariat of Education) what was observed. At the school level, the observer should follow the rubric to observe the class; as such, this observer evaluates the performance of the class, gives feedback to the observed teacher, and brings out some recommendation of an “ideal” class. A vision of English and its teaching is immersed in training and rubrics to observers. The CO rubric exercises power when the observer assesses a class, and it represents a fact to carefully follow. Also, the interaction between the observer and observed teacher evidence relations of power at the institutional level.

The last part to keep in mind deals with how the observers themselves experienced the subject position of observers. Juan Manuel, Tania, and Wilson understood the observer subject position as one that must be met with respect to all the conditions pre-established by the institution that hired them. Although some of them enjoy the privilege of being an observer (salary, hierarchies, etc.), thus expressing compliance with salary, time/ labour, and target objectives, two of them (Tania and Juan Manuel) were critical of the absence of the feedback phase that good classroom observation practices incorporate. As was explained, these observers are part of a National Bilingualism Program; they knew the specific duties this job offers. However, it seems there are times when the feedback provided by the observer is disregarded. The feedback component provided by these 3 participants when observing a class is ignored. There are blanks for this item, because what really matters are the performance, evaluation, and general characteristics data in a class observation.

Tania and Juan Manuel have worked as teacher educators in Bachelor of Arts programs, and they have guided teaching practicum subjects in which feedback is fundamental for noticing aspects to be improved or acknowledging results... so being subjected to the observer subject position brings to the surface these other experiences in which the feedback entails contact, conversation, and an interchange of ideas.

Despite the rigid system of knowledge in which the observer administers the format, these narratives illuminate that being an observer of other teachers confronts observers

themselves with their positions as teachers. Being in the other shoes means that an observer does not hide the position of a teacher but the opposite, it allows the observers to connect with their own identities as teachers in similar contexts. It seems to us that notwithstanding the subjection to the format, the format itself does not obscure observers' knowledges and their own subjectivities. Subjectivities understood here as being a "site to resist and heal the wounds left by the antagonistic forces that turn us into subjects of a practice" (Méndez, 2021), that in the case of Tania can be seen as caring and being empathic, (quite conscious of the teachers' duties and desires); in the case of Wilson also, in his being professional and objective (ways he regulates formats) and Juan Manuel, who performs himself as a local observer (who identifies the educational contexts).

CONCLUSIONS

The reason most used for observing classes is to evaluate several pedagogical / disciplinary items. Although observers play a decisive role in this practice, their subjectivities appear to be mistreated by the system, by local regulations, external educational institutions and by the instruments they use during their work. This analysis tries to understand the positions of observers who have been neglected by the canonical way to observe in the ELT field in which the canon places more importance on what is to be observed and not on who observes or who is observed. As a result of this analysis, a more humanistic perspective is needed to modify vertical relations in classroom observation practices and create better conditions to get to know the subjects involved in this practice.

Based on the literature review of class observations as a practice, perspectives on subject positions (pedagogical consultant, mentor, trainer, class observer), and the narratives of ELT observers, we can argue that participants in this study experienced the observer subject position via recalling their previous experience as English language teachers; whose comprehension of this practice made them realize on the one hand that they follow a normalized practice that even though it is established it is still in need of being problematized and, on the other hand, within the same constraining practice and observer subject position they were able to play as local observers to value the complex context of English language teaching. Having said that, it was noticeable that affirming the observer position does not exclude the English language teacher position who is empathetic with colleagues, nor does it exclude the observer's critical views about observation classroom patterns, including training for observation and their struggles, tensions, and contradictions. Although, the three observers in this study recognised the calls in education towards greater value-neutral objectivity and top-down hierarchies in classroom observation, all agreed on the need to give a more horizontal, relational, and humanistic vision to this practice.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDED FUTURE STUDIES

The results of this research are presented from a biographical analysis and bring on personal points of view or subjectivities in theoretical and conceptual stances and do not provide an objective view of the data analysis. There is another limitation in this study that has to do with the little literature on the positions of the ELT class observers

(scholars around the world research a lot about classroom observations, but not on ELT observers and their positions against this practice); At the same time, it remains the few observers who provide information on their practices (either because they cannot talk about this, or they declared exclusivity clauses with some entity during its observer's training). Finally, the sample size of the narratives must be larger; future studies require a more considerable sample of participants, who have a desire for reflecting and proposing ideas about the positions of ELT observers.

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ANNEX 1

Autobiographical narrative excerpts (written between May-July 2019)

Autobiographical events	Data. Juan Manuel's autobiographical excerpts	Observers' note-taking (1)	Data. Juan M autobiography's excerpts	Observer's note taking (2)
1- "Becoming observer, the Knower Observer." Pre- Observer	<p>"The first thing that came in my mind was in 2004. I have been selected to be observed, checked, evaluated, and tested... No way! I said once. I talked to this person outside the classroom. I did not want to be part of this project; they didn't observe my classes and of course, they could be out of my class."</p> <p>"My path as a classroom observer started some years ago (2006) when I started working at a university in a language bachelor program. I was the English area coordinator, and as part of some actions taken for the University's policies, the coordinators' team decided to have some class observations from the area teachers to characterize the pedagogical practices we had. I did not receive any training, except for some suggestions from the team to include in the observation form. I remember there were lots of resistances and 'buts' during the meeting I socialize that idea with the English teachers; as a result, it was a difficult thing to schedule with them such observations."</p>	<p>There were always some head teachers, trainers and / or experts joined to the knower observer in these first steps of observations. It is a guidance process at the beginning and later it could be done alone, by herself / himself.</p> <p>It seems this practice of observation (at the very beginning) is not worked with specific parameters or rubrics, the theory learnt in some courses (University classes, CELTA training theory and /or empirical knowledge) is essential in the Knower observer.</p> <p>Also, some practices of feedback, following patterns/rules of observation and standard procedures are seen during the starting point to become an observer.</p>	<p>"The directives mentioned the importance of having external training and observations in our role as Teachers, the "These people (observers) were helping us, they offered new dynamics in our experience and the schools influenced more and more on maintaining the "others" right there".</p> <p>"At the end of the day, I ended up feeling frustrated and judged by my colleagues, since they felt as if I had been evaluating their performance. My boss (Coordinator) at the time used some of that information to not hire some of them posteriorly. That made me feel even worse. I was passive towards that situation".</p>	<p>The role of the Knower observer: to see, analyse and identify the insights of the observation.</p> <p>Another role/duty of the knower observer is to gather information which will be valuable to study and evaluate something. The observation (in the first time) is useful to identify the "realities" of a classroom.</p> <p>The knower observer could make comparison about the theory acquired in classes towards the real performance of teachers inside classrooms.</p> <p>It is a "shock" for the knower observer to identify the real aspects of classes through an empirical, methodological, and systematic observation. It is identified a process of feedback during the time the knower observer is standing. There is a privilege for evaluating the performance of teachers during the observation. In our culture (ELT field, Colombia, BA programs, etc) the observation is a normalized practice, and the knower observer should keep in mind that... this person understands the importance of following patterns, rubrics, guidelines, among other instruments, technologies into the practice of observation.</p>