Does the number matter? Making a case with only one participant in qualitative studies on English teacher identity

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Abstract
If standards of qualitative research design are met, then studies with only one participant should be publishable. Unfortunately, these standards can be interpreted differently. This paper seeks to better understand how a case is made with only one participant, in research publications on English teacher identity. This was done by identifying recent publications (2017-2020) and then analyzing them with a modified framework for assessing depth of data saturation. Five articles were identified and in the analysis, it was found that most articles lacked the standard of transparency as details about data collection and analysis were minimally given. For all articles, there was a shared research focus (teacher emotions) and research design (restoried narratives). What contrasted most of these papers was found only after the analysis, when the author contacted the corresponding researchers to ask if they had issues using a focal participant. Four researchers responded – each with unique circumstances surrounding their paper. These analytical findings and author correspondences illustrate that the standards perpetuated for qualitative research need to be considered cautiously. This paper also proposes recommendations for English teacher identity studies with data from only one participant, especially if publication is the end-goal.

1. How it all Started

Your paper is well written and addresses an interesting and relevant topic. However, given the high number of submissions we receive, our priority is to publish articles with rigorous data and which move the field forward with new observations, ideas, and constructs. Your paper provides a narrative inquiry of just 1 English teacher in Malaysia. The main findings are that this study supports the notion that teacher professionalism is a dynamic and multi-faceted construct. While a good finding, it is not novel enough to warrant publication in Journal A.

This is feedback I received in August 2018 for a paper I wrote on the challenges a Malaysian English teacher faced when made to manage an English Teaching Assistant (an American university student doing volunteer teaching in Sabah), on top of other administrative, teaching, and student-welfare responsibilities. The paper wanted to give the English teacher a voice to critically examine 'help' that was conventionally perceived as valuable, which turned out to be the opposite. Data for this study was collected from seven months of dialogic journal writing, followed by four months of narrative restorying with the participant. What I thought was well-planned research presenting an insightful and unique case – considering the lack of research on the impact of volunteer English teachers – was however evaluated as lacking in new observations. Also, what appeared to be of significant concern to the editor was that the study did not present rigorous data and that data came from just 1 English teacher in Malaysia.

This was intriguing, and it made me think of the design of qualitative studies, particularly the number of participants in studies on English teacher identity. So far, I have read and cited published studies with data derived from one English teacher. Furthermore, qualitative data from these participants were derived from either one or very few interviews, or other qualitative data sources. This led me through a journey of better understanding the characteristics of published papers on teacher identity, especially studies that focused on data from just one English teacher. Guided by Perry's (2011) discussion of a discerning research consumer, the first step I took was to revisit Tracy (2010), whose work was crucial to the research design of my study that was rejected. Next, after being reacquainted with her work, I further problematized the main concerns raised about my work – rigorous data and just 1 English teacher. Then, to verify what I had read, I analyzed recently published English teacher identity studies focusing on one participant (2017-2020) with a modified analytical tool (a combination of iterative analysis and data saturation depth frameworks). These steps, which are discussed in the following sections, are presented in chronological order – in the sequence of the different steps taken.

2. Quality in qualitative studies: Data saturation, unique participant and context

Tracy's (2010) framework to evaluate qualitative studies has been cited frequently, with 6253 citations reported by Google Scholar as of September 19, 2021. In her article, she proposed 'key markers' to conduct and evaluate qualitative studies, which are (1) worthy topic; (2) rich rigor; (3); sincerity; (4) credibility; (5) resonance; (6) significant contribution; (7) ethics; and (8) meaningful coherence. These 'key markers', when read closely, appear to be an infusion of long-established standards for qualitative studies (e.g., rich rigor, credibility, and significant contribution as markers of data saturation), with postmodern perspectives (e.g., sincerity and resonance as markers of subjectivity and reflexivity). The infusion appears to be quasi-foundationalist in nature, which stipulates that qualitative studies should affect theory, collect and analyze empirical findings, present generalizable findings, and illustrate reflexivity (Lazaraton, 2003). These attributes can be met if a qualitative study attains data saturation, which is the point where the collection and analysis of data does not produce new insights (Croker, 2009).

To achieve data saturation, a researcher may need to spend time collecting data, possibly from multiple data sources, and at the same time analyze the data. The researcher is also encouraged to be transparent with these procedures (Croker, 2009). For publications in journals, data saturation appears to be a crucial expectation. In Lazaraton's (2003) review of guidelines for qualitative studies, 'prolonged engagement', 'ongoing observation', and 'prolonged fieldwork' are listed as characteristics at the top. These are echoed by Tracy (2010), who states that tacit information pertaining to a participant or his/her context will become visible after 'significant time' in the field (p. 843). Aside from extent of engagement with data, the depth of data saturation is also shaped by the research objective and research design of a study. Hence, data saturation should never be perceived as a static evaluative notion for all types of qualitative research. To apply this to the previous discussion, 'prolonged engagement' with data thus may not entail a recurring encounter with the data source, as rich data does not have to necessarily come from a lot of data. Unfortunately, according to Nelson (2017), the misconception that 'more data means is better' remains prevalent among many qualitative researchers. This problem is further exacerbated when researchers do not tease out complex meanings potentially found in their data (see also Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Closely linked to data saturation is the source of data. While it is possible to achieve data saturation by having multiple data sources (Croker, 2009), relying on one data source over a period of time also seems feasible. Perhaps, when there is only one source of data, a longitudinal approach is warranted given that the data source is unique. For instance, the participant in Miller, Morgan, and Medina (2017) was very keen on being a successful language arts teacher, and he was supported by his workplace to engage in professional development. What is seen here suggests that the uniqueness of the participant, as well as the context, can affect data saturation. The importance of context is reported by Lei and Liu (2019), who found that the growth of studies on teacher identity may be due teachers' work setting, especially those who reside beyond the common publishing centers such as the USA and the UK. These contexts offer a variance in sociocultural and multilingual issues affecting non-native English-speaking teachers in terms of their personal and professional identity development (e.g., Clarke, 2018; Loo, 2017).

3. Meaning in qualitative data: Recent developments

The scope for both data saturation and the uniqueness of a participant may be further extended, especially with recent developments in applied linguistics. In his paper on posthumanist applied linguistics, Pennycook (2018) posits that meaning is not necessarily the product of the 'endless vacillation between structure and agency'; instead, meaning is gleaned from 'a wider distribution of semiotic and material resources, as interpellated by objects', and also should not be the 'precursor of specific interactions' (p. 457). Meaning, in this sense, can be derived without the reliance on structures found in context, neither does it need to be reflexive. This paradigm is not new, as seen in the proponents of integrational linguistics. Cowley (2012), for instance, argues that meaning is 'distributed' beyond communication or discourse. Meaning is derived from natural human know-hows in resolving a problem or responding to an issue, and that language, as a vessel for meaning, should allow dynamic understandings (Cowley & Gahrn-Andersen, 2019). Such dynamicity in meaning can be observed in Kubota's (2019) work, "Confronting epistemological racism, decolonizing scholarly knowledge: Race and gender in applied linguistics". In her paper, Kubota addresses racism and sexism ingrained in the field of applied linguistics, even within the epistemology of leading scholars who champion equity in the field. Kubota shares an anecdote, where a colleague had congratulated her for being cited in a leading scholar's publication, and that colleague was also happy because she herself was cited by him – a white male scholar. This anecdote formed the basis for Kubota's (2019) work racism within the field. While seemingly minute, it is perhaps through the integrational approach in applied linguistics that micro-structures of discourse, such as that experienced by Kubota, can be acknowledged. In this case, data saturation seemed achievable, even if meaning was found in fleeting interactions, without the need for a transparent mechanism for data collection or analysis. The participant, however, should probably occupy a 'unique' position, through the recognition of his/her expertise, or that he/she is well regarded over particular issues, such as the case of Kubota. Meaning, thus, can be exclusive as the meaning-maker may only be privileged to a select few.

4. Making the case: Recent publications

In the previous sections, I presented standards potentially vital for researchers to consider, when writing and preparing qualitative works (i.e., narrative studies on one English teacher) for publication. I focused on data saturation and the uniqueness of a participant, along with some vignettes of current developments in applied linguistics. The next step was to determine how these standards may address my research aim. To this end, I sought to answer the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the level of data saturation in qualitative studies with one participant?
RQ2: How is the uniqueness of a singular participant addressed?

The findings may shed light on standards as seen in published articles that study one participant. Findings may also help compare research aims of teacher identity studies, which will extend on Lei and Liu's (2019) report and Yuan's (2019) findings, where teacher identity studies have focused on initial problems faced by English teachers, especially those who had just joined the teaching force, and the subsequent success in overcoming the problems. Studies on teacher identity have also discussed teachers becoming aware of their professional selves, as well as other entities found in their professional context.

4.1 Identifying relevant papers

In this section, I present the process taken to understand the characteristics of published research papers on teacher identity based on one participant. I started by identifying relevant published papers. Taking after Yuan's (2019) critical review on nonnative English teacher identity research (2008-2017), this study identified pertinent published papers by using relevant keywords as search terms. Keywords such as "language teacher identity", "narrative inquiry", "discourse analysis", "case study", "ethnography" and "one participant" were search terms used in Google Scholar. The search was delimited to the years 2017 to 2020, and yielded 17,200 items. I sifted through the first 20 pages of results (each page was set to show 10 articles) and identified an initial set of 14 articles, which were decided based on their titles that seemed to allude to a study of one language teacher. The 14 articles were further filtered, which led to a final five. Articles that were removed were those that had more than one participant, treated narratives of several English teachers as an encompassing voice, examined the identity of a language teacher not teaching English (but the English language is considered a variable in the study), or had a focus on a critical issue (not the English language or the teaching of it). The initial 14 articles and the final five (highlighted in gray) are presented in the table below.

Table 1. List of initial articles and finalized articles for analysis (in gray)

1. Multiple dimensions of teacher identity development from pre-service to early years of teaching: A longitudinal study (Hong, Greene, & Lowery, 2017)
2. Navigating native-speaker ideologies as French as a second language teacher (Wer nicke, 2017)
3. Identity development: What I notice about myself as a teacher (Gallchóir, O'Flaherty, & Hinchion, 2018)
4. Leaving or staying in teaching: A 'vignette' of an experienced urban teacher 'leaver' of a London primary school (Towers & Maguire, 2017)
5. Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform (Tao & Gao, 2017)
6. Making sense of not making sense: Novice English language teacher talk (Stanley & Stevenson, 2017)
7. Negotiating contradictions in developing teacher identity during the EAL practicum in Australia [Art. 1] (Nguyen, 2017)
8. A story of culture and teaching: The complexity of teacher identity formation (Edwards & Edwards, 2017)
9. Making it relevant: How a black male teacher sustained professional relationships through culturally responsive discourse (Thomas & Warren, 2017)
10. 'This game is not easy to play': A narrative inquiry into a novice EFL teacher educator's research and publishing experiences [Art. 2] (Yuan, 2017)
11. Exploring language teacher identity work as ethical self-formation [Art. 3] (Miller, Mogan, & Medina, 2017)
12. A language teacher's agency in the development of her professional identities: A narrative case study (Kayi-Aydar, 2019)
13. Expanding the language teacher identity landscape: An investigation of the emotions and strategies of a NNEST [Art. 4] (Wolff & De Costa, 2017)
14. Supporting a pre-service English language teachers' self-determined development [Art. 5] (Ager & Wyatt, 2019)

4.2 Analyzing the papers

The final articles were analyzed according to the following sub-steps: (a) selecting and developing a guide for analysis, (b) implementing the analysis through memoing, and (c) collating memos for deeper understanding.

Since my research objective focuses on the better understanding of a particular type of published work, and as I was unsure of what to expect, I opted for an open framework which allowed the data to speak. I found Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) iterative framework, which consists of three questions for researchers to ask themselves when analyzing qualitative data in a grounded manner. These questions are:

Table 2. The iterative framework (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 78)

Q1: What are the data telling me?
Engaging explicitly with theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological, and field understandings
Q2: What is it I want to know?
In relation to research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest
Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?
Refining the focus and linking back to research questions

These questions were modified for specificity with Nelson's (2017) conceptual depth criteria for evaluating the depth of data saturation. The reason for selecting Nelson's framework over Tracy's (2010) was because Nelson deals primarily with data saturation, whereas Tracy's work looks at the qualitative paradigm comprehensively. Furthermore, Nelson's framework was deemed suitable as the main issues mentioned by the reviewer had to do with data, and not my research study as a whole. Even though Nelson's criteria aim to evaluate the saturation of qualitative data, they did give allowance for author subjectivity to be accounted for, namely through the criterion of resonance. This framework was chosen over Tracy's as Nelson provided case examples of how the framework was applied. Furthermore, Nelson's guidelines sought to evaluate the depth of data saturation, instead of checking through characteristics of a qualitative study as a whole. Nelson's guidelines are presented in Table 3, the subsequent fine-tuned questions are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. A summary of Nelson's (2017) five criteria to evaluate depth of data saturation

Range	**Complexity**	**Subtlety**	**Resonance**	**Validity**
Regularly recurring observations or meanings found in data	Meanings and categories of meanings are revealed and defined. Definitions include the rich networks between meaning	A very intimate understanding of findings, to the point where nuances, ambiguities, and contradictions are revealed (but not necessarily reconciled or clarified)	Findings are conceptually relevant to other established theoretical frameworks; there can be some variations	External validity is crucial, in that findings are compared other studies; when links can be drawn between findings, the researcher can then propose applicability, as there is room for convergence between findings, albeit collected from different studies

The iterative framework, modified based on the criteria for depth of data saturation, resulted in the following modified questions (MQ) to guide the analysis of the five selected articles. These questions work together to address the two RQs stated earlier.

Table 4. Specific questions to guide analysis of selected papers.

<table>
<tr>
<td>*MQ1: What are the data telling me?
Meanings or concepts that are constructed based on one English teacher
Explanation of the meanings and concepts, and the process of arriving at the meanings and concepts
The ambiguities or nuances found in the English teacher
Situating the study within the broader area, and its applicability</td>
<td>MQ2: What is it I want to know?
Identifying and evaluating claims made based on one English teacher
Teasing out complexities from one English teacher
Extending meanings and concepts from one English teacher to others' experiences found in published work
Situating meanings and concepts from one English teacher within a particular theoretical frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">MQ3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?
Meanings or concepts that the teacher assume (e.g., position), and the way data is used to achieve the position(s)
Representing complexity in terms of form and meaning
Discussion of one English teacher with other related works</td>
</tr>
</table>

**Modified Question (MQ)*

In the close iterative reading, memos were taken as I responded to the text, guided by items in Table 4. Memos were written to ensure the transparency of the researcher. These memos were formulated based on Birks, Chapman, and Francis' (2008) recommendation, which are to leave a conceptualization trail as illustration of one's decision-making journey; to identify meanings which stood-out for the researcher; to record initial thoughts for further analysis at a later time; and to reflect the evolutionary nature of qualitative studies. While memos can take different forms, it is important to ensure that they are substantive, as well as meaningful. The analysis and subsequent memoing were guided by MQ1 and MQ2. Each article was read at least twice, with memos written on the margins of the articles. These memos were then collated, and examined in light of MQ3, which serves as a basis to address the RQs.

5. Findings

There was a total of 78 memo items, all of which were coded based on their relevance to MQ1 and MQ2. There were 50 memo items which corresponded with MQ1 (64.1%) and the remaining 28 corresponded with MQ2 (35.9%). These memo items are presented in the Appendix.

Before discussing the RQs, I will first address MQ1 and MQ2. MQ1 aims to build an overview of the purpose of the research papers. From the memos, it appeared that I interacted more frequently with information under this category. This could be due to my interest to know how these studies justified their research objectives. The main concept that these papers deliberated on, and sought to further problematize was teacher emotions. In terms of practical necessity, these studies were set against the background of English teachers' contribution to the economy and high financial returns (Art. 1 & Art. 5); the pressures faced by English teachers/ teacher-educators at the higher education level (Art. 2); teaching (well) as an ethical endeavor (Art. 3); and the growing number of non-native English-speaking teachers (Art. 1, 4 & Art. 5). In theoretical terms, the researchers presented an extensive review to signify their studies' link to others', with only one paper making a direct link with theory (Art. 3). The extensive review also served to highlight the ambiguities found by other studies that share the same research focus. Through the review, the researchers pointed out research gaps (see Table 5), and the applicability of their studies to the broader field of teacher identity.

Table 5. Gaps of the finalized articles

Art. 1	**Art. 2**	**Art. 3**	**Art. 4**	**Art. 5**
The lack of studies of emotions in L2 teacher identity development	The construction of L2 teacher-educator identity in relation with being ethical	The formation of language teacher identity as highly contextualized and politized, through social interactions and ramifications	The development of teacher identity as a response to emotional demands set by the classroom, school and the society	The need to examine teachers' fragile cognitions, emotions and motivations in a unique context

MQ2, on the other hand, seeks to establish the claims made based on the findings from one unique English teacher. All the researchers did warn that the claims made were not necessarily generalizable; instead, the claims should be taken for the purpose of guiding the notion of teacher identity development. How claims were derived may be drawn from each study's analytical steps, and most of them provided only a brief summary. Only some researchers mentioned how coding or thematization was done iteratively. The iterative analytical process may account for the researchers' prolonged engagement – a standard expected of qualitative studies. This was the case because it was difficult to consider prolonged engagement based on time spent collecting and analyzing data, as the duration for data collection and intensity of data analysis differed across the five studies (Table 6).

Table 6. Duration and intensity of data collection

Art. 1	Art. 2	Art. 3	Art. 4	Art. 5
Data* was collected in the second semester, during a two-week practicum	Data* was collected in the participant's first year at a new workplace through three semi-structured interviews (one hour each). Interview data was enhanced by data* from field notes.	Data* collected through seven interviews over nine years	Data* (from semi-structured interviews, class observations, stimulated verbal and written reports, and prompted journal entries) was collected and recursively evaluated over one academic year	Data* from observation notes over one semester and semi-structured interview (post-observation)

**Extent of data collection not mentioned, for example, how many words were yielded from the interviews, or what topics or issues were brought up in the interviews? How many journal entries were collected?*

Aside from the lack of explanation regarding the depth of data collected, researchers also did not clearly articulate their analytical procedures (except for Art. 2 and 4), with details confined to only a few sentences within a paragraph (see Table 7). All the studies took a cyclical approach to interpret the participants' narratives, which subsequently allowed the restorying process (see Clandinin & Connelly, 1989).

Based on the findings gleaned from MQ1 and MQ2, the dialectical relationship (MQ3) between what the data tells me (the analysis of concepts in published papers on one English teacher) and what I want to know (the way in which claims are made about the concepts) indicates that an iterative analysis of a teacher's discourse is sufficient even without longitudinal data collection, given that the teacher presents a rich context that may resonate with other relevant experiences. Furthermore, in terms of complexity, these studies present contradicting emotions experienced by individual English teachers that affected the formation of their professional identities.

Table 7. Excerpts explaining data analysis from finalized articles

Art. 1	**Art. 2**	**Art. 3**	**Art. 4**	**Art. 5**
… a close examination of transcripts with a focus on the content rather than linguistic features. Three levels of coding were performed using NVivo 10 … (p. 405)	… ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing the mini-stories in line with Glen's different identities, the storyline of his narratives gradually emerged, which knitted them into three 'story constellations' (Craig, 2007) … (p. 480)	… we have adapted Clarke's (2009) "Diagram for Doing Identity Work" ... , given that it draws on the four main dimensions or axes of Foucault's (1983) understanding of ethical self-formation … (p. 94)	… we analyzed the data corpus by using a constant-comparative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) … teacher identity categories that emerged from the data were recursively evaluated … connected these emergent categories with the gamut of emotions … emotions were juxtaposed with the various pedagogical strategies … cycling back and forth between the multiple sets of data and weaving together Puja's spoken and written narratives … (p. 81)	… Key themes emerged inductively from the data, via recurring thematic coding (Robson & McCartan, 2016).… this awareness developed subsequently, affording a revisiting of the data, to code for reported mentoring behaviours and feedback … (p. 110)

5.1 The RQs: Lessons to learn

RQ1 aimed to gauge the extent of data saturation in the five articles analyzed. In the earlier parts of this paper, it was discussed that data saturation can be attained through prolonged engagement with the data. In the five studies, prolonged engagement does not necessarily mean an extended period of time for data collection or analysis, nor does it necessitate the authors to demonstrate an extensive or complex coding system for data analysis (See Table 6 and 7). Instead, what was observed is the coherent restorying of narratives of individual teachers, supported by related studies, such as that recommended by Fusch and Ness (2015). Perhaps time only becomes a valid variable when prolonged engagement to identify changes over time is the research objective, such as that seen in Art. 3. Another important observation is that most of the studies relied only on one main data source (the individual teacher's narratives), with peripheral sources sometimes used to confirm observations made from the primary data source.

The restorying of narratives seemingly gave an intimate and expert perspective of participants' personal and professional lives. The restorying process began with a snippet of the participants' narrative (taken either from an interview or a journal entry), followed by the researchers' interpretation, which includes support from relevant studies. This may have contributed to the sincerity the narratives, as the researchers were transparent about other works that informed their interpretation. This mode of discussing narrative data is, in fact, 'three-dimensional' (see Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), where there is a movement across different pedagogical aspects or social entities encountered in the participants' narrative, all of which are subsequently used to address the research objective of each individual study. The five studies achieved this by linking the participants' narrative and the researchers' interpretation with the participants' history and the contexts of the studies, such as participants' language and professional background, their current undertaking (pre-service teaching, in-service teaching whilst doing research, professional development), as well as their future aspirations (what they intend to achieve as an English teacher/teacher educator). Aside from the value of drawing links between various issues affecting teacher identity, the three-dimensional approach may also be appropriate as it highlighted ambiguities and nuances seen through the participants' emotional flux, primarily contradicting emotions. An example for each study is provided in the table below.

Table 8. Some emotional contradictions

Art. 1	**Art. 2**	**Art. 3**	**Art. 4**	**Art. 5**
Taking pride in a lesson that went well vs. feeling inadequate in personal communication	Standing up for one's professional conviction vs. Accepting fully comments of others	Prioritizing students' learning vs. Achieving high scores in official assessments	Placing importance on the role of teacher in the classroom vs. allowing students to be involved in learning	Teaching English to students vs. being corrected by mentor

RQ2, on the other hand, sought to identify how the uniqueness of a single participant was established. From the five studies, uniqueness is seen to be formed based on the descriptive accounts of the participants' educational, cultural, language, or professional trajectory, as well as the parameters of the study. These details are not just used to create the setting, but it is also used to inform the interpretation of the narratives. Other means of attributing uniqueness is the crossroads which the participants find themselves in: teaching practicum (Art. 1, 4 & 5); starting a new job (Art. 2); developing over time (Art. 3). These crossroads occur in settings common to language teachers, but it is the rich extrapolation of various and contradictory emotions experienced by these participants that made them uniqueness.

Another noteworthy characteristic is how these participants, most of whom are non-native English speakers (Art. 1 and 2, Art. 4 and 5), were able to overcome some, if not most challenges. Furthermore, even though there was an optimistic undertone in the participants' restoried narratives, they were not outlandish. The researchers paid careful attention to experiences which could be weaved with observations from other relevant studies. Bringing in observations from elsewhere helped the researchers create a sense of objective outlook. This not only added credibility, but it helped me see relatable experiences. For example, reading Art. 1 and 4 reminded me of the contradictory nature of teaching I encountered when doing my teaching practicum a decade ago. Art 2, on the other hand, resonated with a current personal dilemma, where the type of research I engage in is not considered valuable by my current workplace. In addition, uniqueness may have also been achieved through a hopeful narrative, which is aligned with the current trajectory of psychology-based research in applied linguistics. Specifically, there is a growing interest in positive psychology to counter the preoccupation with discourses of deficit. This approach does not refute the existence and the value of challenges teachers (and language learners) may face; instead, it shows how evidence that affect teaching and learning can be drawn from success stories (see Dewaele, Chen, Padilla, & Lake, 2019). This affirms the reports of Lei and Liu (2019), as well as of Yuan (2019).

6. Making a case with one participant

Throughout this journey – reading about qualitative research, particularly data saturation; identifying studies and subsequently analyzing them – it appears that a case can be made with rigorous data from just 1 English teacher. First, I found that data saturation can be achieved through the depth of complexity seen in the restorying of the narrative of one English teacher, without spending a significant amount of time in the field (contrary to the proposition by Tracy, 2010). Moreover, how complexity is achieved does not need to be divulged. There are several reasons for this: the familiarity of members in the community towards narrative studies; or even the subscription to the posthumanist approach in applied linguistics, where established discourse structures are not referred to for meaning construction. Nonetheless, there is a recent caution voiced by Lew, Yang, and Harklau (2018), who state that a lack of description of the analytical approach, along with the researcher's (and potentially the reviewers') subjectivity, may impede the standards of a qualitative study, especially since these variables affect the analysis and presentation of qualitative data. Though seemingly with good intentions, this may be difficult to act upon, especially when journals in applied linguistics, as claimed by Lazaraton (2003), do not publicize their evaluative criteria for qualitative studies.

Second, a case can be made with one participant, but only if the topic examined is of interest to the larger field. This reminds me of the editors' comments about publishing studies that move the field forward – a remark I agree with. The studies shared the same focus, which is emotions being the foundation for the examination of teacher identity. The growth in research on emotions may be a response to the acceptance towards the complex nature of teaching, as well as the growth of accountability systems at all levels of education around the world. These studies, then, may be addressing a timely concern, and at the same time providing different shades of emotions bound to teachers' personal and professional contexts (see Clarke, 2018).

To further verify if one participant would be sufficient to make a case for a narrative study, I decided to email the main authors of the five studies examined. This was an afterthought I had after the analysis was done, and I did not have any expectations for the authors to respond to me. In my email, I asked if there were any issues brought up, during the review, regarding the use of only one participant. Four authors responded. The first to respond mentioned that were no problems using data only from one participant; instead, concerns were raised about the participant being a real English teacher. The second author, on the other hand, mentioned that it was difficult to get papers on one participant published. This author recommended that studies on one participant should provide a strong justification for the sampling and the uniqueness of the participant. The author also mentioned that perhaps it would be easier if there were more than just one participant. The third mentioned that her article was an invited contribution for a special issue on pre-service teachers. The article went through the typical reviewing procedure and there were no concerns over the use of only one participant. Finally, the fourth mentioned that as long as data was rich and robust, there should not be any issues with using one participant. The correspondence with these authors was reassuring as they showed that studies of teacher identity with just a focal participant can be published. However, the findings from this study's analysis of their papers, the second respondent who mentioned reviewers' varying expectations, and the third author who was invited to contribute, may indicate that the pathway into publishing on one teacher can be varied.

7. Concluding remarks

There seems to be an acceptance for research on a single participant. These studies may not immediately affect theory in teacher development, but they do compel the field to think about concerns affecting teacher identity. Moreover, the integrationist approach may have played a role in opening the field to be more accepting of individual stories. This may be valuable to further demarcate standards expected of both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, and encourage researchers to answer the call for small stories in language education. Nonetheless, there will still be instances where gatekeepers insist on the way knowledge is constructed, such as that seen in Tupas' (2017) experience, where his paper was rejected on the basis that his methodology was not clearly articulated (what is considered 'clear' can differ, such as that seen in the five articles examined in this paper).

At the personal level, this experience gave me some clarity about the paper being rejected. I looked at that paper (which was eventually published by a regional journal (Loo, 2018)) and realized that my pursuit to comply with the standards had overshadowed my research, a warning given by Nelson (2017). This experience is a lesson for me to be cautious, even towards conventions of the field (see Grant, 2019). Not that I aspire to be a renegade and protest against standards, as I do believe that these evaluative frameworks have been shaped sensibly; nevertheless, they should be applied only after some critical thought. In a way, it made me question my earlier actions in research, such as the need to cite Tracy's (2010) framework for standards in qualitative studies – was I merely committing 'flag-waving', because everyone else was citing her? (see discussion on academic celebrity by Walsh and Lehmann (2019)). Perhaps in religiously complying with the standards of quality, I was distracted from telling a meaningful story of *just 1 English teacher*.

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Appendix

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