2018

Teacher-Researchers' Reflective Narratives on Their Experiences at the Language Center Research Committee, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Kamla S. Al Aamri
Sultan Qaboos University, kamlas@squ.edu.om

Munira K. Al Wahaibi
Sultan Qaboos University, munirak@squ.edu.om

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie

Teacher-Researchers' Reflective Narratives on Their Experiences at the Language Center Research Committee, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

Kamla S. Al Aamri
Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

Munira K. Al Wahaibi
Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

Abstract

The current study reports on findings of using self-narrations by three teacher-researchers (two of whom are the authors and the narrative inquirers of this study) to reflect on an English as a Foreign Language–based research experience in a newly established Research Committee (RC) in their work place. A narrative frame tool in the form of sentence starters has been utilized to guide the narration and generate data from the three teachers' previously lived research experiences in the Committee. It is worth noting here that these three teachers had been working and actively engaging in research work before they had their memberships in the RC. The findings of this study are hoped to be significant and useful in learning about and highlighting the expectations of these three teacher-researchers of the research committee work, their learning experiences about research, and their challenges and how they defeated them, as well as their future inspirations. Further, reflecting on these findings can also help the trio with their professional development and growth as well as that of their colleagues at the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS), which was formerly known as the Language Centre (LC) at the time of their memberships. The study concludes with some pedagogical and practical implications regarding the experience of reflection, narration, and learning research.

Background of the Study

This study took place at the Center for Preparatory Studies (CPS) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Al Khoudh, Oman. The CPS is a support and academic organization that is accountable for teaching English to all students admitted to SQU. A language center research committee (LCRC) was formed within the CPS in the spring of 2012. One of the goals of the LCRC was to spread research culture among the CPS teachers. Additionally, the LCRC attempted to inspire particularly the teachers of English as a foreign language, who are also the teacher-researchers, in order to engage them in teacher research and to use the committee services to elevate their academic and personal skills in line with their institutional development. The committee's mission was to support and aid researchers in carrying out their studies,

conducting research, raising awareness, and supporting teacher-led researchers. Additionally, the LCRC members reviewed research proposals and validated research instruments for applicants (Al-Maamari, Al-Aamri, Khammash, & Al-Wahaibi, 2017).

The LCRC consisted of a Head, an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher who was given a six-hour release time out of 18 teaching hours, and five additional regular EFL teachers who were not rewarded release time and had either an interest or knowledge of doing research (Al-Maamari et al., 2017). It is worth noting that membership in the LCRC requires some research background experience

The purpose of this study is to reflect on the experiences of three teacher-researchers regarding their service on the Language Center Research Committee (LCRC). This service allowed them to access rich layers of information that provide a deeper understanding of the details of the participants' points of view and extra insights to apply the findings of these narrative inquiries in their own context. Therefore, investigating the experiences of the LCRC members can assist in fostering this committee's work in the future. The authors of this project were encouraged to reflect on their own research experiences in the LCRC for the purpose of enhancing their professional development and reshaping their identities as teacher-researchers.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the goals and functions of the Language Centre Research Committee (LCRC)?
- How does the LCRC contribute to the professional development of its members?

Literature Review

A close reading of relevant literature shows that there have been ample researched works and documented studies on English language learners and narrative research. These studies were performed in different settings and executed in different research fashions. To start with, Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) investigated the teaching experiences of university English teachers working in China. They designed four sets of narrative frames that extracted data from a large group of participants who were involved in a summer teacher education programme. The focus of the researchers was on finding out about the usefulness and effectiveness of using a narrative frame approach in research. Simultaneously, their study also highlighted some of the frame limitations in depersonalizing the experiences of teachers. One main drawback of this study is that it was only centered on the narrative frame as a tool in qualitative research and focused on its pros and cons in using it in teacher research.

Cavendish (2011) wrote her whole dissertation on three international teachers using narratives (which were autobiographical records and reflections) to find out how international teachers' unique positions, experiences, and perspectives affect their attention to cultural diversity within their classrooms. Again, the focus of this study was on cultural diversity and narrative experiences of teachers and not researchers.

On a similar note, Benson (2014, p. 154) led a study in which he reported four main conceptions of narrative which are everyday talk, life histories and autobiographies, grand narratives, and the canonical story. Also, he exhibited a number of studies in applied linguistics, which mainly relied on the activity of storytelling. Benson's study focused on some published studies that used current innovations in data collection (e.g., the utilization of mixed and longitudinal methods, and the use of narrative frames and multimodal data) and data analysis (e.g., discourse of narrative and the use of narrative writing). He concluded that these modern innovations were "a welcome trend toward methodological diversity" in the field of language teaching and learning. Yet, one existing shortcoming in his study was that it only concentrated on "recent applied linguistics research" and a group of some documented studies that used narrative writing in either its data collection or data analysis rather than tackling researchers' narrative experiences with research.

Another body of literature was added by Cheng (2016, p. 1) in his narrative inquiry of identity formation of EFL university teachers in China. His study aimed to examine the "trajectory of identity formation" of EFL tertiary-level teachers. His study data were derived from two sources: one came from life histories of three well-known linguists and the other one from semi-structured interviews. The study findings revealed that those in the first group followed a linear path in forming their identities by transforming from inexperienced EFL teachers to PhD researchers, and eventually to famous applied linguists. On the contrary, those in the second group took a looping pathway, having the characterization of both EFL learners and EFL teachers during their professions.

Cheng (2016, p. 2) also endorsed the metaphorical, three-dimensional space frameworks which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested in analyzing any narrative research data. These dimensions are temporality (represents past experience), personal and social space (in relation to other individuals), and place (at a specific place). Cheng's study clarified that their identity did not occur in "a vacuum." It passed through three-dimensional spaces "backwards and forwards" (i.e., temporality; past, present, and future), inwards (i.e., the internal conditions, such as hope, frustration, and moral dispositions) and outwards (i.e., toward external conditions such as environment) and at a specific place. Thus, this will help the researcher who uses narrative inquiry in their studies to bear in mind that the storied lives of the studies he or she is investigating have been developed with meaningful interactions over a period of time in specific contexts.

In another research study, Mehrani (2017) investigated the purposes for which language teachers carry out research studies at a tertiary level at the University of Neyshabur in Iran. His study also examined the opportunities and challenges that teachers encountered when doing action research. Data were extracted from multiple sources, which included a survey of narrative frames and narrative essays, plus interviews with willing participants. He found that teachers as practitioners were concerned with developing and enhancing their teaching skills and improving students' learning in certain language areas. In addition to this, the study agreed on the facts that time constraints, a lack of specialized research knowledge and skills, and an absence of cooperation between colleagues were major hurdles they faced when carrying out action research.

Most of the researchers who have used narrative inquiry in their studies have stated that narrative inquiry consists of stories that are "lived and told." These stories reveal interesting and vital findings and commonalities that can positively contribute to any educational setting. Mehrani (2017, p. 96) has discussed two advantages of the data collected from narrative inquiry in investigating the importance of action research. First, it helped inform policymakers and stakeholders what was possible and desirable in action research. Another advantage was that the voices of the participants, who lived the story, can be heard and "incorporated" into the processes of making decisions and implementing educational polices. Again, his study is limited in the sense that it only focused on benefits and challenges the teachers faced while doing action research. As opposed to our study, Mehrani's employed various ways of collecting data.

As regards our Omani context in the Centre for Preparatory Studies and as per the authors' knowledge, there has been only one recent study, entitled "Promoting EFL Teacher Research Engagement through a Research Support Programme" carried out by Al-Maamari et al., (2017, p. 1). This study focused only on one of the Research Committee's dimensions, which was the Research Support Programme (which in turn makes it limited). Also, it examined the teachers' perceptions of their experiences in initiating and carrying out teacher research using this programme. By drawing on data from an online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews, the findings showed that the Research Support Programme has been highly effective in supporting teachers to initiate and lead their own research studies despite the "contextual constraints" of the time factor and work pressure. (p. 1)

The aforementioned studies exhibited some limitations in different ways. One is that they focused on investigating the experiences of language teachers and practitioners more than those of researchers. Second, they were performed in different settings and utilized variant research instruments. Given these limitations, this study intends to fill in important gaps by focusing on EFL teacher-researchers' narrative experiences outside of the classroom setting. Also, the setting of this study took place in the Centre of Preparatory Studies, where the focus is on teaching more than research, for it is a teaching unit. However, teachers use and conduct research as a means for continued professional development. Further, the Arab and Omani context of this paper gives it another unique feature and a remarkable difference compared with other studies. Last but not least, this study utilized a research tool that is different from the above-mentioned studies in the literature.

Positioning the Study within the Narrative Research

Narrative inquiry represents a long-standing tradition in qualitative and other types of research. In particular, "reflective narrative" is the "process of looking backward over the terrain of the personal past" to reflect on it and narratively speak or write about it. In another definition, narratives are described as "texts which tell stories of lived experience" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 3)

In a different study, Barkhuizen et al. (2013), defined narratives by giving diverse definitions, one of them being "a profoundly human way of carrying out research, it gets you out of the house or office and into the real world of teachers, learners, and the stories they have to tell [about themselves]" (p. 18). Also, according to them, a narrative frame is one example of written narrative data among many others, such as diaries, language-learning histories, and reflective teacher journals (Barkhuizen et al., 2013, p. 48). Further, they define a narrative as a "written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. It is structured as a story in skeletal form. The aim is for respondents to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and their reflections on these" (Barkhuizen et al., 2013, p. 60).

"Narrative knowledging" is another term that can be related to this. It is brought up by Barkhuizen (2014), and it is narratively making meaningful sense of an experience and telling stories about it. Thus, this lived experience of the teachers in the field of research can be narrated and retold in an expressive and useful way so that other colleagues and practitioners can learn from it. Additionally, he also mentioned that narrative inquiry "brings storytelling and research together either by using stories as research data or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings" (p. 18).

On another side, it is worth distinguishing here between two terms that appear similar, yet in reality they differ in meaning and content. These are "narrative analysis" versus "analysis of narrative." Donald E. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguished between these two concepts: "narrative analysis" refers to research in which stories or anecdotes are used as data and "analysis of narrative" means using a storytelling approach as a method of analyzing and presenting findings" (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2013, p.18).

As discussed in Barkhuizen et al., (2013, p. 27), narrative inquiry covered several topics in the field of language learning that consisted of learning strategies, motivation, persistence, age, individual difference, autonomy and self-directed learning, plus learning with technology. Additionally, in their study, they have asserted that there has also been some narrative literature on second-language literacy, bilingual parenting, language policy, experiences of emigration and transplantation, and language loss.

Apart from the above-researched fields of language teaching and learning and for the context of our study, we are going to adopt the term "autobiographical" suggested by Barkhuizen et al., (2014) and a narrative frame approach to investigate our experiences as teachers-researchers in the EFL research context.

Research Design

Tim Murphey, Chen Jin, and Chen Li-Chi (2004) used a set of questions for their narrative study; these were discussed and analyzed by Barkhuizen et al., (2013, p. 53). These questions were temporal (reflecting on a past experience and looking to the future), emotive (positive and negative experiences),

reflective (beliefs, expectations, and practices), and strategic (plans and goals). Likewise, our narrative questions and statement starters followed the same nature but they were thematically different. So simply, our research tool is a template of narrative frames that we have developed and designed. These frames were actually 18 sentence starters that respondents had to complete. The frames were categorized into four themes that were predetermined and decided on in advance (Barkhuizen et al., 2013). These themes included: *expectations*; *benefits, challenges, and solutions*: and *aspirations and future goals*, which will be discussed in the following section.

This frame has a "supporting and guiding function" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 4). The sentence starters were written in a way so that each respondent would write freely and openly but in a guided way. Also significantly, a participant instruction sheet was produced to accompany the sentence starters in the template to instruct the participants on how to go about completing the frame. The instruction sheet consisted of three items that instructed the respondents on how to fill in the spaces using their own reflective experience in the RC.

We chose to write narratively about our "autobiographical" frames to reflect on our EFL research practices in the research committee for the sake of professional development and finding out our teachers-researchers' identities. In this context, it is the narrations of our lived experiences.

Participants' Profiles

Participant A is an assistant language lecturer. She got her BA in TEFL from Sultan Qaboos University in 2001. Her highest qualification is MA in applied linguistics for language teachers. She is a language teacher, a practitioner, and a researcher. She had been engaged with EFL research, writing research papers and presenting at international conferences before she joined the Research Committee. To date, she is still involved in teacher research and classroom action research. She served in the Language Centre Research Committee as a member for four years, from 2012 to 2015.

Participant B is a senior language instructor at the Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University. She has an MA in TESOL. She also holds a BA in TEFL. While she was working in the Language Centre Research Committee, she relied on her MA research experience. She was a member in the Language Centre Research Committee for two years, from 2014 to 2015.

Participant C is an assistant language lecturer and the former deputy director for professional development and research at the Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University. He received a BA in TEFL from Sultan Qaboos University (1999), an MA in English language teaching from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom (2001), and a PhD at the University of Bristol (2011). He served as the Head of the Language Centre Research Committee for four years, from 2012 to 2015.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Barkhuizen et al., (2013) states that "[t]here is no single way of carrying out a narrative inquiry study, and indeed it seems that each new study brings with it a new approach." (p. 14). The same fact applies to our study; it commenced with a call from the first author to three teacher-researchers who were also members in the LCRC for participation in this study. The reason why the call was sent to this number of potential participants was because these were the ones who worked closely in a previous research paper tackling the Research Programme in the Committee and its effectiveness in promoting ELT research. Two of the three participants responded and expressed willingness for participation (to complete the narrative frame) and one expressed her desire to coauthor this paper.

Summary of Key Findings

It can be understood that narrative inquiry intended to collect what Xu (2014, p. 245) called a "small corpus" of narratives that cannot allow for broader generalizations to be made. This study's findings can be briefly described as follows:

➢ Although the members of the Research Committee who are the narrators of these stories expressed some main challenges (time constraints and full workload) in their way of research work, they were proud to make some achievements of professional growth and finding self-identities on their research journey. To put it clearly, being involved in reviewing proposals and instrument validation has a predominantly positive impact on participants' academic, personal, social, and professional skills, which have been affirmatively sharpened.

➢ One salient finding that has to be emphasized is that although the existence of challenges in our institution is inevitable, the members have proved to be efficient and capable overcomers of these challenges. They have found their own ways to deal with those obstacles so that they get the best of their experience in the RC.

➢ The Research Committee proves it self to be a truly good hub for an individual to practice research work and research review.

➢ The gap between the members' expectation of the Research Committee (RC) and the reality of the nature of their duties at the RC has pointed out that the vision of the Committee and its statement of mission was not clear to LC staff. This is why there is a big gap between the expectations of the teachers who have applied for a post in the RC and what the RC offers them in reality. In order to bridge this gap, RC decision makers should review their vision and mission statements and write a clear policy document including the duties of RC members.

Discussion of the Findings

We have categorized our narrative data using the paradigmatic content analysis of the narrative frame used by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008). To be precise about how we went about our data analysis procedures, we moved back and forth in a "zigzag" pattern between our narrative data and their

interpretations so that we could reach and generate a conclusive statement and insightful input to our work. This process, which was called "iterative" by Zoltán Dörnyei (2007) was repeated until we reached the level of "saturation" and thought that extra data collection and interpretation would not add any insights to our findings (Dörnyei , 2017, as cited in Barkhuizen et al., 2014, p. 87). As mentioned earlier, the data analysis has resulted in identification of the following themes: *expectations*; *benefits, challenges, and solutions*; and *aspirations and future goals.*

Expectations

Suresh Canagarajah (2012) asserted that the act of composing the narrative enabled him to explore some "hidden feelings, forgotten motivations and suppressed emotions" (Canagarajah, 2012, as cited in Benson, 2014, p. 157). Hence, this applies precisely to our narrative context. Our stories started with some hopeful expectations that we made as members upon the establishment of the Research Committee in 2012. Although these anticipations seemed great and high, they took different trajectories once we started working in the LCRC. To start with, the Head of the committee expected the members' familiarity with research practice and skills. However, his expectations were not successfully met as he disappointedly stated, "The majority of members had little solid grounding in research theory and practice" (Participant C).

On the contrary, for Participant B, her expectations were "really high." She further wrote, "I was expecting that I'd develop my own research skills. I thought there would be professional discussions on recent topics in the Educational field 'generally' and ELT 'specifically.'" Participant A ended up saying that "the only work we did was mostly research proposal review and instrument validation."

In reality, these expectations did not stem from or happen in a vacuum. There must have been a source for them. If we just examine the policy document produced by the former Head of the Committee, there was an item there that says members are expected to "[c]onduct and publish research in collaboration with the Head of the LCRC and/or its members" (Al-Maamari, 2012). However, with the existing reality of challenges, this was not successfully achieved.

From all these extracts, it can be deduced that the RC vision and its statement of mission were not clear to the LCRC applicants (who were applying for a membership). This is why there is a gap between the expectations of the people who have applied for a post in the RC and what the RC offers them in reality. In order to bridge this gap, RC decision makers should review their vision and mission statements and write a clearer document including the duties of RC members. Thus, there is a need for a task description sheet that should be sent to all staff along with the call for applications.

Benefits, Challenges, and Solutions

The six sentence starters in this theme have explored the bright side of the RC and have highlighted that the respondents' experiences carry a lot of positives. Despite the fact that the work the respondents did in the RC was faced with some challenges, this did not stop us from continuing our research journey. We still had some gains to boast about. One of these was finding the experience of research review and instrument validation to be "sometimes interesting." To put it clearly, Participant B said: "[Research Committee work] helped me foster my skills and widen my research knowledge, particularly in writing a good proposal and investigating topics in education/ELT fields." Another boon expressed by Participant B was that her skills have developed at the "social and personal levels," and "through [her] interaction with [her] LCRC colleagues and members." As she stated, "I've become a good listener and a good reviewer." She also said, "I've noticed the professional growth of my comments and the Head of the RC has informed me about that." This truly confirms the dimension of social space of the members and their interaction and relations with others as proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

Likewise, this EFL research experience was "useful" to the Head (Participant C) in a different way. As he asserted, not only did it help him foster his skills "in communication with people of different levels of research knowledge and practice, but also helped [him] see how novice researchers view research and how to deal with the challenges that come with all of this." Another blessing for him was that his "professional skills have become more sensitive to the limited views that teacher-researchers sometimes have had about research."

Similarly, the experience in reviewing proposals and instrument validation for Participant A was "intriguing, enriching and professionally developing." She asserted that this experience has contributed positively to her growth at the academic level as well as the social and personal levels. Along with that, she developed a group of skills via her interactions with her RC colleagues and members, RC service users, and peer researchers. To cite an example, she has noticed that her professional skills have "truly increased and witnessed some growth."

Thus, knowing about the "emotive" part of the RC members' experience should encourage the decision makers to document the advantages of being an RC member in the policy document. Hence, this will give a clear picture of what applicants for RC membership can gain from their memberships. And yes, it is an open invitation for all interested teachers to join the Research Committee.

It is worth noting here that the members in the RC did all their work on top of their busy and fully packed schedules. Notably, this has not been without any hiccups. For instance, the Head has found the research review and instrument validation to be "sometimes frustrating, as the reviewers focused more on editing questionnaires rather than commenting on research." Plus, another hurdle he expressed was "balancing LCRC reviewers based on their professional experience and knowledge about research practice and convincing MA students [the users] that validation is not a technical task, but one where the reviewer is required to make their research transparent to the reviewers." He further explained that he was challenged by another obstacle, on "how to convince the LCRC members to change some of the limited views about research in the sense that all non-PhD holders seemed to think of feedback as more judgmental than formative." He added, "In numerous meetings, I tried to bring back the LCRC [members'] attention to the

main aim of the research committee, which is to develop the applicants' research and give quality feedback rather than focus on small point comments on style or statements." This challenge and lack of "specialized research knowledge" and skills has been discussed and documented by Mehrani (2017) as a major obstacle to teachers when performing action research.

Thus, for our context and to alleviate this hurdle, does this suggest that all Research Committee members should have a PhD as their highest qualification? And if so, is this going to be a fair standard for applicants who would like to join the Committee in the future? Or should we get more training to be better prepared for the review work, especially since in our case we (the authors) fall under this category of non-PhD holders? We merely counted on our MA experiences and our personal research work. For now, we decided we had better leave this to our readers to decide on and judge.

As for the strategies he employed in coping with those challenges, Participant C stated that he managed that by "maintaining a close scrutiny of reviews made by some of the LCRC members so that professional, mature and constructive feedback reached the applicants."

In another response, Participant B described some of her challenges, which included "lack of knowledge about some topics and the task itself was a challenge as all the members of RC were reviewing the same work." Some other challenges were concerned with the research support users from within the LC or outside. She said:

> Some topics were ineffective and worthless but it was difficult to stop them from conducting their studies. It was like their studies would not add any new ideas or any beneficial findings to the place and ELT area. RC didn't have the authority to stop any researcher from conducting his/her studies. It was there as a helping entity.

Some of the other obstacles that Participant B encountered were "time constraints," having "no release hours," and difficulty meeting deadlines. She further mentioned that she carried out work based on her own knowledge. She elaborated by saying, "In fact, I had to read and check some documents to build a clear picture about the proposal I was asked to review. It was the job of the LCRC head to review our comments and had a face-to-face conversation with the researchers."

Participant B commented that the Head of the Committee was the one who conveyed all the members' feedback to the applicants. Members were not given a chance to know what each other's feedback was. Since members can learn from each other, a "standing" member or a rapporteur should be assigned to liaise and review on feedback among members before meeting applicants and discussing their proposals and instruments.

How did she manage her challenges? She said she did so by:

honing some personal skills such as pressuring myself, working under stress and showing commitments, meeting deadlines, and reading more about the topics which I didn't have background about. [Another option was] consulting the Head of the LC as he was helpful, approachable and knowledgeable had helped me a lot to overcome these challenges.

As for Participant A, she pointed out that reviewing proposals and instrument validation were done based on her own "personal experience" and "self-taught research background." It is vital to highlight that all members had never been given the chance of a formal training to do the review work and research-related tasks. Although the former Head of the Committee himself spared no effort in conducting some workshops—on NVivo and Design, Implementation and Analysis of Online Questionnaires, as well as giving presentations on Various Research Approaches and Relevant Methodological Implications, Observation as a Data Collection Strategy, and on "Overview of Professional Development and Research for Language Centre Teachers: Opportunities, Policies and Resources—we think we needed more at the institutional level and the Committee level, too. These professional development sessions were not exclusive to the RC members only; however, they were conducted for all interested teaching faculty in the Language Centre.

Another problem expressed by Participant A was "a lack of scholarly interactive communication and transparency among the team members." This was not a surprise when we think that the source of this challenge was workload and pressure.

As for some of the strategies she employed and how she managed her difficulties pertinent to research work, she "[spared] some time for doing and fulfilling the required tasks and asking for some time extension to submit work before the deadline." She continued, "Also, I overcame them by reading a lot on research books and methodology. Furthermore, I was diligent in attending some workshops offered by the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies and Research."

Aspirations and Future Goals

Notably, this section represents the coda of our story. The five narrative frames of this section imply that there is a need for the RC to "wear a different uniform" and to reform and upgrade its services in order to play a more important and effective role in enhancing and boosting research culture among teachers, practitioners, and researchers from within the LC and other institutions. In fact, this part offers some valuable suggestions, which were out of a deep experience (either being a teacher-researcher or a former research support provider) at the RC, for the Committee to function better. To exchange ideas and disseminate knowledge among other practitioners and researchers, the RC should adopt "a bigger platform and broader network." Moreover, it should provide research funding and more solid support to teacher-researchers and establish an affiliation with accredited journals. And the Committee should be held responsible for getting some institutional resources, such as the most up-to-date research tools and software, including data collection and data analysis software; this in turn will enhance the teacher research culture.

All the members have been hopeful and ambitious about the future. Therefore, they expressed some goals and future plans. One is that the "LCRC should conduct [more] professional and purposeful workshops/training courses to its members. Members should be Fully-trained to be mentors if their guidance is needed," said Participant B. Another suggestion came from Participant A: "I feel there should be a platform for all ELT researchers teaching in different institutions in Oman to exchange their own experience and disseminate ELT research-culture and knowledge among practitioners and researchers."

What's more, Participant B hoped to see some changes in the research culture, such as publicizing the services the Committee offers not only in our workplace context, but also in other higher education institutions, as well as endeavoring to have an affiliation with accredited journals in Oman. She said she would like to get more training sessions, either face-to-face or even online ones, on the most up-to-date research tools and software, including SPSS and different types of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Hence, from this platform, she kindly requests the concerned people to implement some of my suggestions and reform the RC to perfectly enhance the teacher-research culture.

Conclusions

This study focused on the investigation of EFL teachers' researchers on past Research Committee experience. The three-dimensional elements of our narrative inquiry—time, interaction, and place, as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000)—should be complete by now. This narrative inquiry has been based on the researchers' experience, which happened in the past and lasted for four years for Participant A and two years for Participant B. Their experience has surely a mixture of internal conditions, such as hope, frustration, and moral dispositions, and it has been developed and obtained at their workplace (LC).

After having served in the RC for four years and my colleague for two years, there are some new changes and additions made since we left the Committee. According to the End of Semester Report produced by the current Head of the Research Committee in 2016, these changes included having a new Head and new members, who continued what we had set up and started (Al-Saadi, 2016). Also, they came with their new goals to achieve (e.g., revise and update policy documents, update the RC webpage, activate Facebook and Twitter accounts, publicize the committee work via promo videos and screencasts, resume training sessions, and set up and organize a Research Support Group and Symposium).

With this in mind, we are aware and enlightened that some of our suggestions might be achieved and some might not, especially when we came to know that the whole RC is changing in form and function and expanding in size after the inclusion of two departments (Maths and IT) alongside the English Department. Therefore, according to the current RC Head, there are going to be four research committees: one in each of the three departments and a central committee headed by the deputy director for professional development and research. Accordingly, the EFL research experience is going to change somehow, particularly after adding Maths and IT courses to the English ones.

To date, our narrated story in the Research Committee has been completed and it is over now. Yet our story with EFL research is still ardent and ongoing. The saga of the RC is still going on but this time with a different title and maybe with some different functions.

Kamla Al Aamri is an assistant language lecturer at Sultan Qaboos University. She got her BA in TEFL from Sultan Qaboos University in 2001. Her highest qualification is an MA in applied linguistics for language teachers. She has been working with EFL research, writing research papers and presenting at international conferences since 2010. To date, she is still involved in teacher research and classroom action research. Her research interests are learner's motivation, learning styles and the role of technology in English Language teaching and learning.

Munira Al Wahaibi is a senior language instructor at the Sultan Qaboos University Language Centre. She has an MA in TESOL from the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. She was a member of the Language Centre Research Committee and she has conducted number of sessions in national and international conferences. Her research interests are learner autonomy and using CALL in ELT.

References

Al-Maamari, F., Al-Aamri, K., Khammash, S., & Al-Wahaibi, M. (2017). Promoting EFL teacher research engagement through a research support programme. *RELC Journal, 48*(3), 389–404.

Al-Maamari, F., (2012). The Language Centre Research Committee: Composition, responsibilities, selection and benefits. (Policy Document No. 1). Sultan Qaboos University, Language Centre.

Al-Saadi, H. (2016). The Language Centre Research Committee end of semester report. Sultan Qaboos University, Centre for Preparatory Studies.

Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Narrative research in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching, 47*(4), 450–466.

Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2013). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Barkhuizen, G., & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experiences of language teachers. *System, 36*(3), 372–387.

Benson, P. (2014). Narrative inquiry in applied linguistics research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics,* 34, 154–170.

Cavendish, L. M. (2011). *Stories of international teachers: A narrative inquiry about culturally responsive teaching* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/

Cheng, X. (2016) A narrative inquiry of identity formation of EFL university teachers. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 4*(5), 1–7.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Mehrani, M. (2017). A narrative study of Iranian EFL teachers' experiences of doing action research. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research, 5*(1), 93–112.

Xu, Y. (2014). Becoming researchers: A narrative study of Chinese university EFL teachers' research practice and their professional identity construction. *Language Teaching Research, 18*(2), 242–259.