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FROM RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT TO RESEARCHER IDENTITY

A Vietnamese EFL University Teacher's Narrative

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INTRODUCTION

Context

Vietnamese EFL university lecturers engage with research in varied ways, and research often intersects with teaching practice.

Problem

Participation in research does not necessarily translate into identifying oneself as a researcher.

Gap & purpose

Less attention has been given to how research experiences from different periods of one professional life are retrospectively connected and interpreted in relation to researcher self-understanding. This study examines that relationship through one teacher's narrative.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does one Vietnamese EFL university teacher narrate the relationship between her research engagement and developing researcher identity?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research engagement

Engagement in and with research, not limited to publication or formal research output; research participation is not treated as equivalent to researcher identification.

Researcher identity development

A situated and dynamic understanding of oneself in relation to research, reworked across time, relationships, and professional contexts.

Narrative inquiry orientation

Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space directs attention to temporality, sociality, and place.

Sensitising resource

Åkerlind's work sensitises the analysis to different meanings of researcher development without functioning as a stage model or predetermined coding framework.

METHODOLOGY

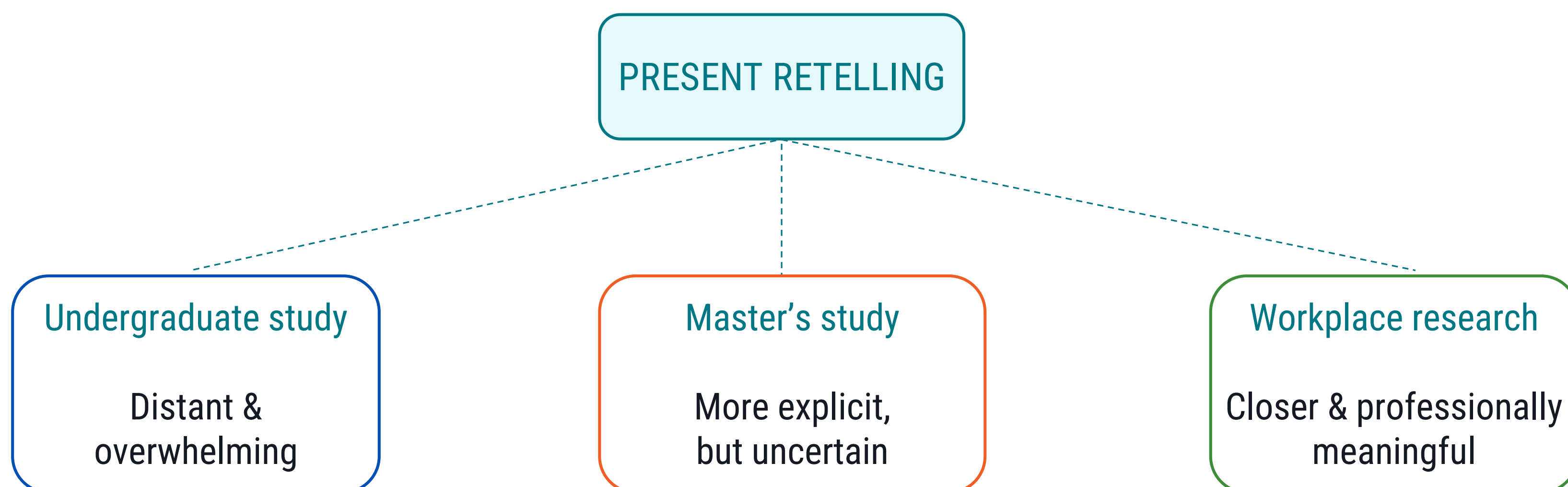
- **Design:** Single-participant narrative inquiry.
- **Participant:** An experienced Vietnamese EFL lecturer with nearly two decades of university teaching experience. She taught General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at a multidisciplinary university in Vietnam.
- **Data generation:** Two narrative interviews in Vietnamese, supported by a pre-interview reflection guide for recalling research-related experiences and a research journey timeline. After Interview One, the transcript was reviewed alongside notes and a preliminary interpretive-reflexive memo to inform the participant-specific second interview.
- **Analysis:** Three iterative movements: reconstructing experiences across temporality, sociality, and place; examining retrospective interpretation and participant-generated self-descriptions; and using Åkerlind's work as a sensitising resource.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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KEY FINDINGS

A changing relationship with research



Earlier experiences acquired different significance when retold from the present.

Early experiences

Research initially felt distant, overwhelming, and unfamiliar. Her undergraduate paper was experienced largely as part of studying at the time, but was later described as “one of my first steps” into research.

“I felt as if I was standing in an ocean of knowledge...”

Master's study

Research became more explicit through coursework and thesis work, but fear, confusion, and uncertainty remained.

“My own contribution, I think, is still very small.”

Workplace research

Research became closer, more practical, and more meaningful when connected with teaching problems, colleagues, and familiar professional settings.

“Research became much closer to me... More practical, more useful...”

Present perspective

The participant described greater confidence in approaching research, particularly in familiar settings, while explicitly distinguishing confidence from mastery.

“If I have to choose... I think I would choose người làm nghiên cứu.”

Inside the research circle: belonging without a settled researcher claim

Belonging

She described herself as already within the research circle.

“Even though I am a very, very small part, I am there.”

Contribution

She viewed her own contribution as small relative to the wider research world.

Context-bound confidence

Her confidence was strongest in familiar, local, practice-related research settings and became less secure in theoretically dense or doctoral-level work.

Naming herself

She identified more readily with *người làm nghiên cứu* [a person who does research] than with *nhà nghiên cứu* [researcher], which she associated with recognised achievements and a higher level of research accomplishment.

Note: The two Vietnamese labels were introduced by the interviewer. Their significance is therefore interpreted within this particular interview interaction rather than as a general lexical distinction.

IMPLICATIONS

- Research activity alone should not be treated as a proxy for researcher identification.
- The case points to the potential value of collegial learning and professionally meaningful research opportunities connected to teachers' work.
- In this case, recognition mattered not only as an external condition but also in how the participant evaluated her own place in research.
- A sense of belonging in research may coexist with hesitation to identify oneself as a researcher.