

Developing reading materials: Pre-service teachers' perceptions and decision-making processes in an English education program

Diseño de materiales de lectura: percepciones y decisiones de los futuros profesores en un programa de pedagogía en inglés

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ABSTRACT

This study explored pre-service teachers' perceptions of developing reading materials as part of a practice-based assessment within an English teacher education program. A qualitative design was employed with nine pre-service English teachers enrolled in a higher education institution in Ñuble, Chile. Data were collected through a questionnaire designed by the researchers and the reading materials produced by the participants, both of which were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal several perceived benefits associated with materials development, including increased engagement, enjoyment, and a sense of accomplishment. These benefits were particularly evident when the materials aligned with participants' personal interests and their intended audience. The process also fostered greater pedagogical awareness, including attention to discursive strategies, author positioning, and sociocultural considerations, contributing to the development of intercultural communicative competence. Despite these gains, participants reported challenges related to digital design skills, as well as linguistic and discourse competence. Overall, the study provides insights into how materials development, when used as an assessment task, can support pre-service teacher preparation and facilitate the integration of pedagogical and intercultural competencies in line with current teaching standards.

KEYWORDS

Reading materials; language learning materials; pre-service teachers; teacher education.

RESUMEN

Este estudio exploró las percepciones de profesores en formación respecto al desarrollo de materiales de lectura como parte de una evaluación basada en la práctica dentro de un programa de pedagogía en inglés. Se empleó un diseño cualitativo con nueve profesores en formación de inglés matriculados en una institución de educación superior en la región de Ñuble, Chile. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un cuestionario diseñado por las investigadoras y los materiales de lectura producidos por los participantes, los cuales fueron analizados mediante análisis temático. Los resultados revelan diversos beneficios asociados a la elaboración de materiales, entre ellos un mayor compromiso, disfrute y una sensación de logro. Estos beneficios fueron particularmente evidentes cuando los materiales se alinearon con los intereses personales de los participantes y con el público destinatario previsto. Asimismo, el proceso favoreció una mayor conciencia pedagógica, incluyendo la atención a estrategias discursivas, posicionamiento del autor y consideraciones socioculturales, contribuyendo al desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural. A pesar de estos avances, los participantes reportaron desafíos relacionados con habilidades de diseño digital, así como con la competencia lingüística y discursiva. En conjunto, el estudio aporta evidencias sobre cómo el desarrollo de materiales, utilizado como tarea evaluativa, puede fortalecer la formación del profesorado en inglés y facilitar la integración de competencias pedagógicas e interculturales en consonancia con los estándares docentes vigentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Materiales de lectura; materiales de aprendizaje de lenguas; profesores en formación; formación inicial docente.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study emerged as part of efforts to update assessment practices and to document the outcomes of such innovations in alignment with current teacher education policies in Chile. The *Teaching Standards: English Teacher Education Programs*, MINEDUC (2021) [*Estándares de la Profesión Docente: Carrera de Pedagogía en Inglés*] emphasize the need to equip future teachers with both strong theoretical foundations and practical instructional skills. These standards aim to prepare pre-service teachers not only with solid linguistic competence but also with the pedagogical expertise necessary to make informed decisions about English language teaching. From this perspective, initial teacher education in Chile seeks to provide the necessary opportunities for prospective educators to respond to learner diversity and address students' communicative and emotional needs within varied sociocultural contexts (MINEDUC, 2021). Accordingly, the current standards highlight the promotion of intercultural communicative competence in teacher preparation programs as a means of fostering culturally responsive and communication-oriented classroom practices (MINEDUC, 2021). In alignment with the national educational policy, English teaching programs have begun implementing curricular and assessment innovations that need to be examined empirically as to how they are enacted in practice. Following that view, this study stems from a classroom initiative which incorporated an alternative form of assessment, with a group of English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers, while adopting a practical and performance-oriented focus on the design of reading materials for school learners. By documenting this initiative, the present study sought to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions of the process of developing reading materials for school contexts, and their pedagogical decisions during this process. The study ultimately aims to shed light on how national teaching standards are integrated in teacher preparation practices.

2. Literature Review

Reading materials are a fundamental component of English Language Teaching (ELT). They not only provide learners with exposure to linguistic models in the target language but also support the development of other language skills (Harmer, 2015). Teachers make use of reading materials to expose learners to new vocabulary in the target language, (Brown & Lee, 2015; Grabe & Yamashita, 2021), engage learners with grammatical structures in context, (Harmer, 2015; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), draw learners' attention to the exchange of ideas (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018) and text analysis (Bloor & Bloor, 2004; Eggins, 2005). Additionally, reading materials serve as a medium for introducing cultural content into the language classroom (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Reading materials are a subset of instructional materials used in language education. These materials are an essential part of teachers' praxis as they are used to support and enhance the learning process (Tomlinson, 2023). Instructional materials extend beyond the use of textbooks to include a broad array of resources ranging from text-based to video-based materials (Tomlinson, 2011). Following Gray (2020), instructional materials are classified into three categories: published materials (e.g., textbooks, dictionaries, and workbooks whether in print or electronic format), authentic materials (e.g., magazines, newspapers, recipes, and songs), and teacher-made materials, which encompass a broad range of resources designed by teachers "to supplement or replace existing materials" (p. 95). This latter category, which recognizes that teachers also create their own materials, aligns with Tomlinson's (2011) perspective that language learning materials are not solely developed by writers but also by teachers and learners. Expanding on this idea, Tomlinson (2012) defines materials development as encompassing "all the processes made use of by practitioners who produce and/or use materials for language learning, including materials evaluation, their adaptations, design, production, exploitation and research" (pp. 143-144). This perspective underscores the reality educators face, as they dedicate a significant amount of time to instructional planning (OECD, 2015), often designing or adapting their own materials (Gray, 2000; Howard & Major, 2004).

The literature highlights the lack of instructional materials tailored to students' needs (Azizah, 2021). Educators often create their own materials to compensate for the gaps in commercially published resources (Gray, 2000, 2020). Such efforts point to the need of tailoring materials to learners' interests (Brown & Lee, 2015; Ismail et al., 2014) and to contextualize language teaching to better align with specific learning environments (Howard & Major, 2004; Rico Troncoso, 2010; Vega-Abarzúa et al., 2024).

In terms of reading materials, their creation or adaptation primarily lies in addressing cultural aspects (Aminullah et al., 2019; Gray, 2000). Over twenty years ago, Gray's (2000) study found that teachers censored and adapted reading materials since these were culturally inappropriate in some EFL contexts. According to the teacher participants,

commercial textbooks often contained stereotypical representations, including depictions of gender roles, alcohol consumption, and social class distinctions. Although this scenario of cultural appropriacy has changed, current research centers on promoting culturally relevant materials on EFL education. Aminullah et al. (2019) advocates for incorporating local cultural aspects into EFL contexts, particularly through reading, as it enhances learners' reading comprehension skills. Similarly, Nabijanovna et al. (2021) point out that culturally relevant reading materials add interest and motivation to read in EFL contexts. Azizah (2021) study found that teacher-made materials, when designed to address the local cultural context, effectively match learners' reading levels, signaling their validity as instructional tools. This supports Tomlinson's (2023) view that developers of reading materials do not need to be experts or scholars; actually, educators and learners themselves can adapt and create language learning resources. Despite these perspectives, research also shows that, to a large extent, language teachers continue to rely primarily on one resource: textbooks. In a study conducted across 94 schools, 95.1% of teacher participants reported using textbooks, compared to 45.9% who did not (Travé González & Pozuelos Estrada, 2017). Interestingly, participants acknowledged that while textbooks do not necessarily facilitate meaningful learning, they are practical in terms of saving time. Another interesting finding was informed by Kuzborska (2011) who focused on exploring teachers' decision-making processes in the development of reading materials in a Lithuanian context. Findings of this study revealed that teachers' reasons to design their reading materials was intuition-led rather than research-based. This implied that teachers' choices were heavily influenced by external factors, including time, finance and principal's requirements, potentially overshadowing the specific needs of the learners.

Developing or adapting language learning materials is challenging as these should serve a clear educational purpose for a culturally-specific context to both motivate learners and facilitate language learning experiences. Even though this complex task is more challenging for pre-service teachers, developing instructional materials poses substantial benefits regardless of the discipline they study. Calik-Uzun et al. (2019) report that an intervention course fostered positive attitudes toward material development, suggesting that future teachers felt both prepared and inclined to adapt their teaching materials. In these lines, providing pre-service teachers with the experience of developing their own language materials becomes relevant.

In Chile, English teacher education emphasizes not the design of diverse learning experiences but also their adaptation to learners' specific sociocultural contexts (MINEDUC, 2021). As a guiding framework for English language teaching, the *Teaching Standards: English Teacher Education Programs* provide a solid theoretical and methodological orientation for pre-service teachers' preparation to adapt, design, and evaluate culturally responsive reading materials. Nevertheless, empirical research examining how pre-service teachers experience and enact materials development remains limited. In particular, little is known about pre-service teachers' perceptions of creating their own language teaching materials. To address this gap, this study aimed to explore the perceptions of a group of EFL pre-service teachers regarding the development reading materials for school education as well as the pedagogical decisions they make throughout this process. Accordingly, the research questions of the study were: *What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of developing reading materials for school education, and what decisions do they make during this process?*

3. Method

3.1 Design, participants and context

This small-scale study was framed within an interpretative paradigm, adopting a qualitative action research approach to explore participants' perceptions in developing their own reading materials. Action research was the most suitable inquiry method, as it allowed researchers to investigate a classroom-based issue in a systematic manner (Burns, 2009). In this line of thought, Efron and Ravid (2020) highlight the dual purpose of action research as it seeks to improve "the practice of classroom teachers and their students' experiences" (p. 11).

The study involved nine EFL pre-service teachers aged 21 to 28 from a university in Ñuble, Chillán. These participants were enrolled in English Reading II, a second-year module in their teacher education program. By the time of the study, participants had already completed the module English Reading I and their first practicum experience. Due to a recent curricular modification intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice, participants were selected to develop contextually relevant reading materials. This change was implemented to align with the current teaching standards for pedagogy programs in Chile. Accordingly, within the area of learning resources, pre-service teachers are expected not only to select instructional materials but also adapt and create them (MINEDUC, 2021).

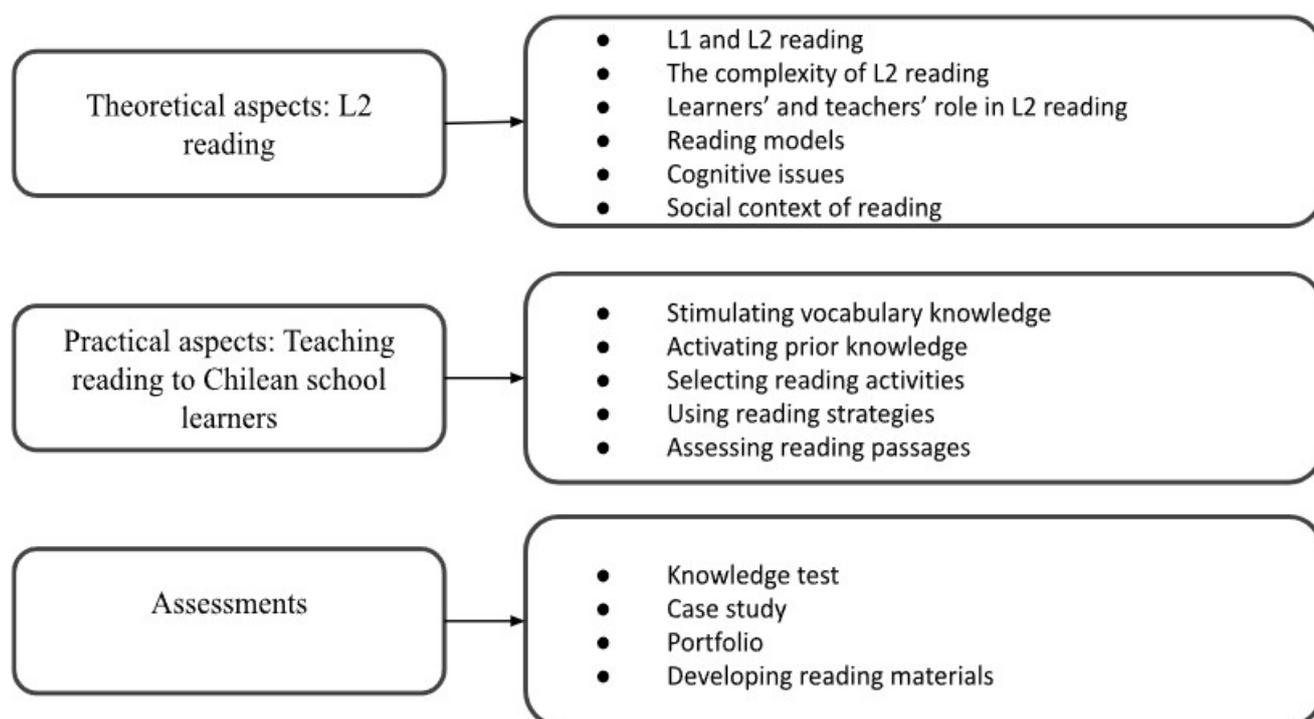
Consequently, the change in the final assessment of the module sought to foster a deeper connection between pre-service teachers' learning experiences and real school scenarios.

In this process, participants' perceptions and decision-making processes were pivotal to understanding how this change influenced their approach to material development, the challenges they encountered, and the pedagogical reasoning behind their choices. Pre-service teachers' perceptions in this study included their perspectives on the process of developing reading materials, encompassing insights into the benefits and challenges they experienced when selecting topics, designing materials, and choosing language based on their understanding of school learners' needs. The study also focused on participants' decision-making processes, understood as the underlying reasons guiding their materials development. All procedures followed institutional ethical guidelines; participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and involvement in the study was unrelated to course grading.

Regarding the structure of the module, *English Reading II* covered both theoretical aspects of English (L2) reading, and practical approaches to teaching reading to Chilean school learners (see Figure 1). The assessment of the module included four key instances, with the final assessment product revised to incorporate the creation of reading materials created for school scenarios, providing pre-service teachers with hands-on experience.

Figure 1

English Reading II Module Structure.



3.2 Instruments and data analysis

The study analyzed two types of instruments: a questionnaire and the reading materials produced by participants. The questionnaire, developed by the researchers, consisted of eight questions aimed at understanding participants' perceptions and the reasoning behind their development of reading materials. The reading materials, comprising nine digital products on various topics, served as a second instrument for data collection. The use of reading materials, particularly digitalized ones, as data sources was informed by Creswell & Creswell (2018).

Data from the questionnaire were first organized in a spreadsheet and subjected to thematic analysis. An initial familiarization phase was conducted, during which the researchers read the responses multiple times to gain comprehensive understanding of the data. Subsequently, the responses were organized in alignment with two dimensions derived from the research question: *perceptions and decision-making processes*. Within the *perceptions* dimension, responses were further grouped into two broad categories which emerged from recurrent patterns in the data, reflecting both the perceived benefits and challenges associated with creating reading materials. Similarly, the *decision-making processes* dimension was analyzed by identifying recurrent patterns related to two overarching areas: pedagogical considerations and elements perceived as motivating for reading. These categories were refined through an in-depth examination of the data, allowing the researchers to identify themes within each category. The identification of themes was informed by the frequency of recurrent ideas across participants' responses.

As a quality criterion for interpretive validity (Maxwell, 2012), reading materials were examined from a socio-cultural perspective to understand the relational and interpersonal processes involved in the participants' decisions (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). As the study focused on the experiential process of developing reading materials, data analysis geared field and tenor of the products, as well as the logical relations and roles corresponding to ideational and interpersonal metafunctions linked to the authors' decision-making. For this last reason, mode and textual metafunctions were left apart. Each reading material underwent a double revision focusing on one aspect at a time. Firstly, the analysis looked through the topic and how the author positioned themselves and their audience while the second analysis identified what logical relations (identity, contrast, clarification, and so on) were built in their materials.

4. Results

To enhance clarity in presenting the questionnaire results, they were organized according to the study's dimensions: perceptions and decision-making processes. The perception dimension is explored through the categories of benefits and challenges in developing reading materials, with various themes identified within each category. As the decision-making dimension involves two types of analyses, the results are presented accordingly.

4.1 Perceptions of developing reading materials for school education

4.1.1 Benefits

Table 1

Perceived benefits of designing reading materials

Themes
• Enjoyment and engagement
• Sense of accomplishment and satisfaction
• Enhanced awareness of language use and self-reflection
• Increased confidence and awareness in material design

Participants' responses from the questionnaire indicate positive views on designing reading materials, identifying four main benefits as summarized in Table 1, above. The primary identified theme was *enjoyment and engagement*. Participants' responses indicate that creating reading materials was both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating. Many found the process rewarding, especially when they could explore topics of personal interest and engage in creative production, as evidenced in the following quotes:

My overall experience was fun because I like creating things (Participant 1).

It was wonderful because I really enjoy talking about Chilean traditions (Participant 2).

First of all, I would say it was fun since I am really passionate about the topic I chose (Participant 8).

Searching for the information was amazing because I learned new things (Participant 2).

A second identified theme was the *sense of accomplishment and satisfaction*. Participants expressed a strong sense of achievement upon completing their reading materials, as illustrated in the following comments:

I feel great with the final product (Participant 4).

I was happy with the final result (Participant 7).

I really liked the final result of my reading (Participant 8).

My overall experience was interesting, and I really liked the final result of my reading passage (Participant 8).

Enhanced awareness of language use and self-reflection was the third identified theme. Participants highlighted the use of artificial intelligence, particularly ChatGPT, as a useful tool to improve their creations. Additionally, some participants reflected on the importance of considering the cognitive and pedagogical aspects involved in reading, beyond the visual design of materials. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

ChatGPT was very helpful, as it made my reading passage look more professional (Participant 7).

It has significantly improved my skills when creating reading materials. This experience allowed me to learn in different aspects, such as designing, looking for grammar and vocabulary, and thinking about what students like to read (Participant 5).

I think this assignment helped me improve my skills when creating reading materials by making me realize that visuals are not the only thing that matters. It made me realize that I need to focus on the reading processes that learners go through, and by making these considerations, I will improve the learning process for my students (Participant 8).

The fourth identified theme was coded as *increased confidence and awareness in material design*. Participants' answers indicate they became more conscious of the social and educational contexts informing their creations. Additionally, it was possible to identify heightened awareness of key aspects such as audience considerations, visual design, and engagement strategies, as observed in the following quotations:

Now I feel more confident in designing materials (Participant 6).

I feel great with the final product because it's very difficult for me to make nice designs with computer software or internet tools. At first, I struggled with it, but eventually, I managed to design a nice reading material (Participant 4).

This assignment helped me improve in the design aspect. At first, I chose an ugly template and didn't consider the students' grade level. If I had to create another reading material now, it would be much easier for me to choose a template, decorations, etc (Participant 6).

This assignment improved my skills in creating educational materials, because I had never done this before. It also helped me develop new abilities to write and new vocabulary (Participant 9).

4.1.2 Challenges

Table 2

Challenges in designing reading materials

Themes
• Design and adaptation
• Creativity and topic selection
• Task requirements and structure
• Language use

Participants' perceptions of designing reading materials were also marked by the different challenges they encountered in their work. Participants' responses allowed the researchers to identify four themes in this category as observed in Table 2, above.

The first theme was connected to the *design and adaptation* of the reading materials. Participants found it challenging to make their creations visually appealing while ensuring they were pedagogically effective. Based on their answers, it was possible to learn that working with digital tools like online graphic design tools added another layer of complexity. Despite these difficulties, it can be evidenced that participants demonstrated problem-solving skills by experimenting with different formats, seeking feedback, and refining their designs as illustrated in the following excerpts:

One of the challenges was making the reading catchy and visually appealing because an appealing design can influence the student's motivation to read in English. I tried to connect graphic elements and colors with the students' prior knowledge, as well as with the subject I selected for them (Participant 1).

The first challenge was the use of internet tools like Canva to make my design, but like I said previously, I managed to create a beautiful design, in my opinion at least (Participant 4).

The first challenge was to organize what type of topics I would choose. Another challenge was to create the structure of the text, such as the colors, paragraphs, font style, title, etc (Participant 9).

Creativity and topic selection was another theme in the challenge category. Participants' answers reveal the intention to select appropriate topics for their reading materials, considering personal interests, students' backgrounds, and the academic requirements of the task. Participants' answers also show that many struggled to find a topic that was both engaging and pedagogically sound. It can also be evidenced that some chose topics that were not well-suited for their intended audience and had to reassess their choices. This challenge encouraged participants to think critically about their audience and the relevance of their content, as evidenced in the following quotations:

The first challenge was to find a topic to write about, specifically one that fulfilled the instructions given for the assessment...In the end, I wrote about Ñuble River because it might be closer to school students in Ñuble (Participant 4).

The challenges that I faced were deciding what the reading was going to be about and determining what grammatical aspects I should use (Participant 5).

The difficult part was thinking about what can motivate students [to read]. I didn't know what my reading material would be about, so I thought about the background knowledge that students might have (Participant 7).

The third identified theme was coded as *structure and task requirement* since clarity and coherence in their reading materials needed to be present. Participants' responses showed that they had to organize their ideas effectively, making sure their texts were both informative and accessible for school students. Many struggled with structuring their reading materials in a way that facilitated comprehension without oversimplifying the content. This required careful planning, summarizing, and revision. This is illustrated in the following comments:

The most challenging part was to write the text. I had the information I needed, but it was challenging to make it easy to read and not too simple (Participant 3).

The first challenge was to organize what type of topics I would choose. Another challenge was to create the structure of the text, such as the colors, paragraphs, font style, title, etc. (Participant 9).

Participants' answers led to a fourth challenge in the development of their reading materials: *language use*. Some participants struggled with verb tenses, while others found it difficult to ensure that their reading materials aligned with the expected proficiency level of their target audience. Additionally, translation issues arose when participants attempted to convey specific ideas in English. These difficulties required them to seek external resources.

The only challenge I faced was the grammar part. I wrote things in the present tense when it should have been in the past tense... (Participant 6).

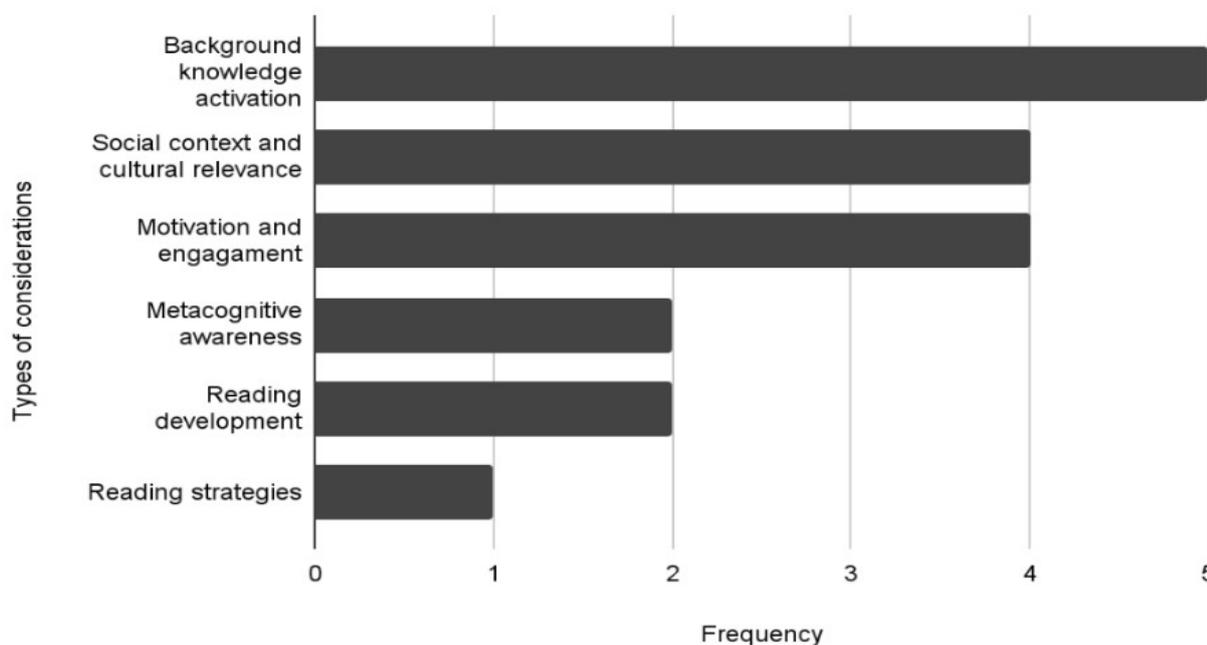
Grammar...I overcame this challenge when I looked for the grammatical aspects 7th graders are supposed to learn in the national English curriculum (Participant 5).

4.2 Decision-making processes in developing reading materials for school education

Questionnaire responses were also analyzed in terms of the types of considerations participants took when developing their reading materials. This portion of the data was analyzed by frequency of mentions and presented in a graph in Figure 1. From these responses, it became evident that the creation of reading materials was guided by careful consideration of various aspects of the reading process addressed in the English Reading II module. The most frequently cited aspect was *background knowledge activation*, with several participants highlighting the importance of connecting new information to students' prior knowledge. Another commonly mentioned factor was the *social context*, particularly the integration of the local culture of the school learners. *Motivation and engagement* were also frequently identified as key considerations in the development of reading materials. Additionally, some participants referenced *metacognitive awareness* and views on *reading development* as important considerations in their creations. Finally, participants noted the facilitation of *reading strategies* as another important consideration when developing reading materials.

Figure 2

Types of considerations for developing reading materials.



Among the specific considerations for developing the reading materials engaging for school learners, participants' responses underscored the elements they believe that contribute to reading motivation. Based on participants' answers, the researchers could identify four themes as presented in Table 3, below. In the first theme, *visual appeal and text design*, participants consistently highlighted the importance of a visually engaging layout in fostering reading motivation. The presence of images, attractive formatting, and typographic features such as bolded keywords were perceived as effective tools for drawing learners' attention. Participants' answers also reveal that learners' experiences and interests are factors that contribute to reading motivation. This information was coded as *content relevance and personal appeal*. In this theme, participants emphasized the motivational power of their materials that would reflect learners' realities, especially in rural settings by incorporating familiar topics, everyday situations, and culturally relevant references. As Participant 6 pointed out, when students see familiarity in a text, they are more likely to engage with the content. Participants' also underscored the importance of maintaining

simple reading materials by adjusting the length to their intended audience. This theme was coded as *appropriate text length and complexity*. In this sense, participants' decision-making processes for the elaboration of their materials was marked by creating short texts with straightforward structures and vocabulary appropriate for learners' level. *Emotional and identity-based engagement* was the fourth identified theme in the aspects that participants believed that contribute to reading in English. Participants pointed to the motivational role of emotional resonance and identity reflection. Through their responses, it is possible to observe that participants decided to develop their reading materials incorporating feelings or aspects that would evoke learners' communities, traditions, or personal struggles to foster a deeper connection with the text. Participant 8 highlighted how such inclusion affirms students' identities, making reading in English feel more relevant and respectful of their backgrounds.

Table 3

Perceived elements that contribute to L2 reading motivation.

Themes	Sample quotes
Visual appeal and text design	An appealing visual design influences students' motivation to read in English and also motivates them to interact with the text (Participant 1).
Content relevance and personal connection with students	It tells a relatable story about topics like family, nature, and overcoming challenges. These are universal themes that can resonate with many students (Participant 6).
Appropriate text length and complexity	It doesn't include a lot of information, just the main information. Nowadays, students tend to be lazy so if a teacher were to include a lot of things, the students probably won't read the entire passage (Participant 2).
Emotional and identity-based engagement	For school learners, it is extremely important that they feel included. Incorporating their culture and beliefs into reading materials will absolutely motivate them to read in English (Participant 8).

4.3 Reading materials socio-cultural analysis

In this study, it was of great value to analyze each reading passage from a socio-cultural perspective considering the EFL context and the initial language teaching preparation the participants are involved in. Based on the general assumption that language is a system of meanings, a functional analysis was chosen to understand how the pre-service teachers constructed meanings, or how meanings were built through the choice of themes, the relational processes and their positioning as authors. In the following lines, results of this analysis are presented accordingly.

As a theoretical and practical principle of language, the functional analysis of the reading materials assumes that when participants developed their products, they were engaged in the production and construction of meaning. From this perspective, the analysis highlights how meaning was built not only through the selection of topics, main ideas, and supporting details, but also through the relationships established among ideas, the positioning of the authors themselves, and their intended audience.

As for the themes chosen, all participants created reading materials about Chilean culture, mainly focusing on southern regions: towns, festivities, native flora and fauna, occupations, clothing, and adventures. The choice of regional topics relates to the fact that participants live in southern Chile, in a city close to the Andes mountains; therefore, the meanings constructed in their materials reflect the experiential knowledge about the region or the country's customs. Although most materials described facts about the aforementioned topics, there were two that reflected the construction of metaphorical relations about the river and the puma, respectively, that revealed strong meaningful connections with the territory and its people.

In the heart of Ñuble, a small river flows through the lush green valleys, nourishing the land and its people. This river, known as the Ñuble River, is not just a source of water; it is a lifeline for the local community. As it winds its way through the forests and fields, it tells a story of resilience and connection (Participant 4).

Raising awareness about the importance of pumas and educating people about their behaviour can also help people reduce unnecessary fear and conflict. By protecting pumas, we not only save this magnificent species but also help keep our ecosystems healthy and balanced for future generations (Participant 5).

As for the type of relations found in the reading materials, participants predominantly chose to express identity. The frequent use of identity relations strongly supports the intended goals of activating background knowledge and relates to the social context of cultural relevance considerations that the participants expressed in the questionnaire as observed in the following excerpts:

An animal breeder (Criador/Criancero) is a person who selectively breeds animals to obtain the best breed for a specific purpose. They often work with local people and animal owners, who ask for animals for different uses (Participant 3).

Our traditional dance is called cueca. It symbolizes the flirting between a man and a woman. Men dress as huasos [country men], wearing hats, jackets, spurs and boots. Meanwhile, women wear traditional dresses with flowers, lace and ruffles (Participant 1).

Some reading materials also incorporated discourse-level elements, particularly the use of interrogative structures followed by recommendations. These elements were employed to engage readers and to introduce content related to visiting and caring for local places, as well as to highlight cultural or environmental aspects such as local attractions, flora, fauna, and cultural practices. The following excerpt illustrates this: "Do you enjoy learning about history? If so, the Museum of Natural History is perfect for you. Located in Plaza Acevedo, next to Jurassic Park, the museum features various dinosaur exhibits" (Participant 7).

Table 4

Interpersonal roles in designed reading materials.

Author	Reader	Identification
Educator	Learners	Participant 3
Tourism promoter	Tourists	Participants 8 and 7
Writer	Nature lovers/ environmentalists	Participants 4 and 5
Fashion promoter	Adolescents	Participant 9
Local culture promoter	Festivity lovers	Participants 1 and 2
Adventurer	Explorers/adventurous people	Participant 6

Participants' reading materials also enabled the researchers to identify the authorial roles participants adopted in relation to their intended audiences when creating their passages. Table 4 summarizes the range of roles and intended audiences identified across participants. Overall, all participants assumed a role of acculturator; however, within this role, some were tourism promoters while others took the role of educator, adventurer, or writer of the local culture, customs and territory. For instance, participants who aimed at facilitating reading comprehension strategies may have adopted an educator role, while those focusing on motivation and engagement may have chosen a tourism promoter or adventurer persona, as observed in the following quotes:

We can see all kinds of jobs around the city, from janitor to a salesman. But, in rural areas of Chile, there are many jobs that are more connected to farming, animals, and traditional practices. In this passage, you will learn about some of these jobs (Participant 3 as educator).

La Tirana is a lively festival celebrated every July in the town of La Tirana, located in the heart of the Pampa del Tamarugal, Chile. [...] Although La Tirana is a small town with fewer than 1,000 residents, it welcomes over 250,000 pilgrims from across the country each year (Participant 8 as tourist promoter).

Last summer, my family and I went on an incredible journey to Las Turbinas and Cascada Los Pellines. I was so excited to explore these beautiful places near Chillán, but I had no idea how challenging it would be! [...] When I got home, I wrote everything in my diary. I described how tired I felt and how amazed I

was when I saw the waterfall. I even drew a picture of it to remember the day with my mom, dad, and little brother. I hope we can visit more places like this soon! (Participant 6 as adventurer).

5. Discussion

This small-scale qualitative study, conducted through an action-research approach, aimed to explore EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions and decision-making processes in creating their reading materials. Findings reveal perceived benefits and challenges in the process of creating reading materials. Among the benefits, participants emphasized the enjoyment and engagement fostered by the creative process entailed in developing their products, especially when tailoring content to their own interests and their learners' needs. In line with this, Tomlinson (2023) points out that the development of digital language materials opens up expansive opportunities for both learners and teachers not only in terms of what digital tools and platforms can offer but also in encouraging critical evaluation and creative engagement with material design. The development of reading materials also fostered a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction among the participants. This positive perspective was also identified by Calik-Uzun et al. (2019), showing that teacher candidates feel confident and prepared to adapt their educational materials. According to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), it is essential for future teachers to engage with a variety of materials in order to develop the skills needed to assess which resources best address learners' needs in the classroom.

Our study also identified challenges in developing reading materials. Participants struggled with the design and creation of the reading materials to be visually attractive and pedagogically sound. In terms of the designs, we observed that participants struggled with using digital design tools. This was an aspect that was overlooked by the researchers as it was initially assumed that participants possessed the digital literacy skills to navigate and use such tools in the development of their reading materials. According to Yılmaz Özden (2023), it is crucial for pre-service teachers to possess digital literacy skills to effectively develop and integrate digital materials into instruction. This aligns with our observation that participants' difficulties were specifically related to using the digital tools, which falls under the technical skills within digital literacy. Therefore, future studies may consider providing proper scaffolding to support pre-service teachers' digital literacy development.

Regarding participants' difficulties to develop pedagogically relevant materials, we believe that a possible explanation for developing reading materials for school learners might have been connected to the lack of further practicum experience of the participants. Wiese et al. (2024) emphasize that pre-service teachers' experiences in schools, specifically during teaching practice, are crucial for the development of their professional competences. The authors highlight that without sufficient practical experience in real classrooms, pre-service teachers may lack the situated knowledge necessary to make effective pedagogical choices. Consequently, we observed that this challenge was also connected to the selection of topics of their reading materials as participants tried to merge personal interests with school learners' interests. For early-stage pre-service teachers, this may pose some difficulties as they are still developing an understanding of their learners' needs and interests. Consequently, without much practical teaching experience, it is possible that participants attempted to rely on their own interests. Future research might consider this aspect by allocating the development of reading materials in pre-service teachers' practicums. By ensuring that pre-service teachers have real opportunities to interact with learners, they can begin to identify their interests and, in turn, use the knowledge to create more engaging and meaningful curricular activities as put by Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005).

Among the challenges, findings also reveal difficulties related to discourse and linguistic competencies. The challenges faced by participants in terms of clarity, coherence and language use related to communicative competence can be linked to their early language preparation stage. Consequently, these difficulties can be grasped as part of the natural process of their professional growth, requiring targeted support and continuous practice to foster their development. According to Thomson et al. (2022), initial teacher education must implement systematic practices to develop discourse competence as this is essential for organizing and conveying classroom information effectively. Similarly, Standards for Teacher Education (MINEDUC, 2021) emphasize the importance of offering future teachers learning experiences that foster the development of discourse and linguistic skills, as these are key to strengthening their communicative competence. In this sense, our findings indicate that early-stage pre-service teachers may require extra support from the instructor and feedback from artificial intelligence tools for their continuous practice to fully internalize and apply the improvements independently.

Regarding the second dimension of the study, decision-making processes, we identified that participants were guided by various considerations when developing reading materials. In particular, participants' considerations were mainly focused on their intended readers' background knowledge, emphasizing the importance of connecting new information to students' existing knowledge, as well as the social context, with a focus on integrating the learners' local culture. This finding contrasts with Kuzborska's (2011) results, which indicated that teachers' decision-making processes were primarily shaped by external factors rather than by learners' backgrounds and needs. A possible explanation for this discrepancy may lie in the context of our study, where participants' decisions were closely aligned with the module content, indicating that certain concepts had been recently introduced and actively reflected upon. Furthermore, participants designed reading materials for an intended audience based on their earlier experiences during their first practicum. However, the materials were not actually used or read by that target audience. This suggests that their decisions were hypothetical rather than tested in practice. Consequently, future research could examine how in-service teachers make similar decisions, particularly when they are no longer influenced by the immediate demands of coursework.

Participants believe that reading motivation is shaped by different elements, including text design and appearance, complexity, topic, contextualization, and connection to learners' identities. A functional analysis of the reading materials allowed us to establish a relationship between participants' decision-making processes and their products, revealing that their choices of topics, the structure of ideas, and their authorial roles reflected a sociocultural awareness and experiential knowledge of the territories and cultural contexts they were describing. These findings pose a contribution to pre-service teachers' intercultural communicative competence development as they reflect on and use their own culture to teach the English language as addressed by Kumaravadivelu (2012). Previous research (Aminullah et al., 2019; Oktarina, et al., 2022; Yaacob & Lubis, 2022) has also addressed the impact of including local culture on reading materials, showing a positive impact on learners' motivation to read. Therefore, providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to create culturally relevant materials for their students can constitute a meaningful strategy for promoting engagement, strengthening language learning, and fostering a deeper connection between language and identity as proposed by MINEDUC (2021).

6. Conclusion

The findings of this small-scale qualitative study are intended to contribute to a growing body of research examining practice-based approaches in EFL pre-service teacher education. The results suggest that engaging pre-service teachers in the design of reading materials as part of an alternative assessment task has the potential to foster heightened pedagogical awareness, reflective decision-making, and sensitivity to learners' sociocultural contexts. In this study, participants not only showed increased engagement and confidence in language learning materials design but also adopted purposeful authorial roles that reflect considerations of contexts, audience, motivation, and engagement.

Moreover, this study highlights the potential of materials development tasks as meaningful spaces for integrating teaching standards into teacher preparation practices. By requiring pre-service teachers to make informed linguistic and pedagogical decisions through the creation of reading materials, key aspects related to intercultural communicative competence were strengthened. Although we acknowledge that the findings of this study are context-specific, they can offer valuable insights into how practice-oriented assessments can bridge policy expectations and classroom practice in teacher preparation. Future research may build in these findings by examining the impact of such assessment practices over time.

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Contribución de los autores

Jessica Vega-Abarzúa: Conceptualización – Administración del proyecto – Curación de datos – Análisis formal – Redacción del borrador original – Investigación.

Margarita Ullo-Toro: Análisis formal – Metodología – Redacción, revisión y edición.

Maximiliano Romero-Herrera: Recursos – Curación de datos.

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