



Pre-service English teachers' perceptions on the value of literature and language studies in language arts education

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study investigates how pre-service English teachers perceive the educational value of literature and language studies within contemporary language arts education. While extensive research exists on teacher beliefs, there remains a significant gap in understanding how future educators navigate the role of these disciplines amidst rapidly shifting digital and multicultural landscapes. The study utilized a sequential explanatory design, surveying 120 undergraduate students and conducting follow-up interviews with 20 participants. Quantitative results revealed a strong preference for digital integration, with the highest agreement for digital storytelling ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.81$) and modern technological tools ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.61$). Furthermore, a One-way ANOVA confirmed that teaching confidence significantly differs across year levels ($F(3, 116) = 2.81$, $p = 0.042$), with third-year students reporting the highest self-efficacy. Qualitative thematic analysis identified a tension between traditional canonical texts and the need for digital pedagogy, alongside difficulties in fostering active student engagement. The findings underscore a critical disconnect between theoretical appreciation and practical instructional readiness. Consequently, the study recommends incorporating practice-based frameworks, such as TPACK, into teacher education to better equip graduates for the complexities of modern classrooms.

KEYWORDS

Pre-service teachers, literature instruction, language studies, language arts, teacher beliefs

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INTRODUCTION

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) is currently undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the demands of the digital age and the rise of multiliteracies. Traditionally, literature and language studies have been the twin pillars of language arts education; however, their roles are increasingly being questioned in modern curricula. Extensive research has examined teacher beliefs in general (Fives & Gill, 2015), yet how pre-service teachers perceive the specific value of these disciplines within today's evolving educational environment remains under-explored. This gap is particularly evident when considering the shift from traditional text-based instruction to digital and multimodal literacy.

Rather than being viewed as isolated subjects, literature and language studies are deeply interconnected in the development of communicative competence. Literature provides the

authentic, nuanced context in which language functions, allowing learners to see linguistic structures in action while fostering empathy and critical thinking (Rowse, 2013). Conversely, a strong foundation in language studies enables students to deconstruct and appreciate the complexities of literary texts. Understanding this synergy is crucial for future educators who must move beyond rote memorization toward a more holistic pedagogy.

In the specific context of teacher education in Thailand, this study is especially pertinent. Historically, Thai English education has been heavily influenced by grammar-heavy instruction and traditional rote learning, often sidelining the aesthetic and critical values of literature (Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011). Despite national efforts to promote "Thailand 4.0" and digital integration, many pre-service teachers still face challenges in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical classroom application (Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2009). Consequently, exploring the perceptions of Thai pre-service teachers is essential for informing curriculum reforms that align with both local needs and international standards.

By examining these perceptions through a mixed-methods lens, this research seeks to clarify how future teachers envision the place of literature and language studies in their future classrooms. The findings aim to provide a practical framework for teacher educators to better prepare graduates for the complexities of 21st-century language arts education.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine pre-service English teachers' perceptions of the educational value of literature in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding.
2. To explore pre-service English teachers' beliefs about the role of language studies in developing linguistic competence and communication skills.
3. To assess the level of confidence and preparedness of pre-service English teachers in teaching literature and language arts in diverse and technology-integrated classrooms.
4. To identify the challenges and factors influencing pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward the integration of literature and language studies in their future teaching practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and literature inform much of English education, especially on learners' critical, cultural, and communicative dimensions. With increasing diversity and a digital focus in classrooms, pre-service teachers need to learn how to teach using both traditional and contemporary methods. For instance, pre-service teachers are increasingly encouraged to use 'digital storytelling' or 'fanfiction' as platforms for students to reinterpret literary themes through their own cultural lenses. This shift reflects a move toward a pedagogy of multiliteracies, where meaning-making is no longer confined to printed text but extends to digital and visual realms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023). This review articulates the most important ideas regarding how these two elements are taught, perceived, and appreciated in relation to teacher education.

Literature and language studies in English education

The integration of literature with language education has historically been an essential aspect of English teaching, providing a holistic approach through which students cultivate accurate language skills and cultural understanding, empathy, and critical thinking. Learning literature as a type of extended prose discourse aids students in grappling with intricate characters, themes, and cultural backgrounds. In so doing, students develop emotional and interpretive sophistication (Appleman, 2014; Yandell, 2013).

Language studies, on the other hand, focus on providing learners with tools to work with language components such as syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse, which are essential for scholarly writing as well as everyday communication. The synergy of literature and language studies fosters academic growth: the former build context and purpose, while the latter provides the workability of detail through grammatical and stylistic breakdown (Fives & Gill, 2015; Borg, 2003).

Contemporary literacy theorists appreciate the expanding influence of these disciplines due to the impact of technology and multiculturalism within the same classroom. The New London Group (1996) introduced the term “multiliteracies,” which called for the inclusion of multimodal, multilingual, and digitally mediated texts within the borders of literacy. Cope and Kalantzis (2023) build on this concept by urging the use of pedagogies that move beyond language as a simple tool to language as a digital resource, attending to learners’ social ecologies in a digitally mediated world. Streets (1984) “ideological model of literacy” likewise critiques the ‘neutrality’ of literacy education, asserting that language and literature are meaningful, social constructions embedded within systems of power and culture.

These theoretical advancements create new challenges for educators. Teacher candidates need to master the content as well as adopt an equipped and critical attitude that allows for inclusiveness and relevance towards the teaching of literature and language at varying levels. More recent studies appear to concentrate on the influence of teacher’s beliefs, self-concept, and experiences on their willingness to use conventional and contemporary texts in the classroom (Alsup, 2006; Rowsell, 2013). Forming effective instructional strategies is deeply rooted in the development of a professional teacher identity. This identity is not static but is continuously negotiated through the interaction between prior personal beliefs and new pedagogical knowledge (Barkhuizen, 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that the self-efficacy of future educators is significantly bolstered when they perceive a direct alignment between their academic training and the realities of modern teaching environments (Fives & Gill, 2015).

Literature as a means of critical and cultural development

In English teaching today, the significance of literature has shifted from being a subject of aesthetic appreciation to something that can promote critical thinking and cultural understanding. No longer is literature limited to its artistic expression. It is now a form through which learners can address social, political, and ethical concerns. With a critical

approach, literary works permit learners to question ideology, master narratives, power relationships and dominations, and call for reflection (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Yandell, 2013). Such participation promotes critical literacy, in which students are not merely text consumers but also active interrogators of meaning and representation.

Such engagement becomes useful in multicultural educational settings. Literature enables students to envision different lives and experiences beyond their own, thus developing social imagination as described by Clark-Gareca (2016) - the ability to appreciate and understand different social realities. This also reflects the work of Fives and Gill (2015) that emphasizes the role of literature in developing interpretive ability and cultural responsiveness among educators. Students, through storytelling, examine identity, voice, and agency and understand vast human experiences across time and space.

Thus, the use of literature in the classroom goes beyond the appreciation of set texts and the dissection of literary techniques; it is about equipping learners to interact meaningfully with their environment. For the pre-service teachers, this view reinforces that teaching literature is on the sociocultural level; it is something that requires engagement, awareness, openness, and intent on the part of the pedagogue. With a shift towards inclusive and critically constructive frameworks in education, literature becomes one of the most important tools for transforming teachers and students into critical and reflective human beings.

Language studies and the tension between form and function

Whereas language studies construct the basis for precise communication, literature nurtures a student's socio-cultural and emotional self. In the past, language teaching concentrated on "form" to include the grammar of a language, including its sentences, and vocabulary. The intent of this method is to give learners a solid framework that is often required for formalized test taking and essay writing. An emphasis on "function" in the communicative approach to teaching has sparked a controversy of whether grammar accuracy or real-world efficacy of the instruction is more important.

Borg's (2003) theory of teacher cognition largely focuses on the beliefs teachers hold about language, which are often formed based on their experience as a student. A number of pre-service teachers, due to being indoctrinated by grammar-obsessed teaching, approach teaching with these archaic beliefs. Zheng and Borg (2014) argue that such beliefs can be at odds with more contemporary expectations for teaching that emphasize communicative and task-based approaches.

This conflict is made more complex by students' engagement in informal, digitally mediated communication, which includes everything from messaging to social media. As Skantz-Åberg et al. (2022) observe, unpreparedness for the reconciliation of formal grammatical teaching with the dialectal reality of their students who fluently employ emoji, abbreviations, and rapid, multimodal slang, leaves many pre-service teachers in deep uncertainty.

Resolving this tension requires pedagogical approaches that combine integration of form and function—teaching foundational grammar basics to learners while contextualizing the instruction within meaningful grammar through communication activities. For these pre-

service teachers, this means classroom instruction that provides models of this balance alongside self-reflection where they can analyze their deeply ingrained assumptions and instructional biases that are often linguistic in nature.

Teacher beliefs, identity, and self-efficacy

All instructors arrive at the classroom with a personal framework crafted by experiences, beliefs, and developed professional values. Fives and Gill (2015) note that such beliefs, often unarticulated, form the core of decision making in instruction. For example, the standards 'good teaching' encompasses, what texts are deemed suitable, and how students should interact with language and literature, do not simply emerge during training. Rather, they filter through a certain mindset. These beliefs inevitably shape how teachers interpret curriculum mandates, instructional materials, and practically diverse classroom contexts.

Alsop (2006) builds on this understanding by analyzing how identity, professional and personal, is constructed as a social process within teacher education. She suggests that all pre-service teachers must find a way to deal with the individual they have come to the classroom as and the professional they are enacting. This negotiation of identity impacts not only the immediate classroom presence and teaching stance; it also influences the depth of alignment with the profession over time.

The influence of reflection and self-efficacy are paramount in crafting effective educators. Poulou (2007) argues that teachers who reflect critically on their beliefs and experiences are more able to adapt their practices to more appropriately accommodate their students. Korthagen (2017) stresses that self-efficacy, one's teaching capabilities, is not a constant feature of an individual's professional identity but changes through a person's experiences, feedback, and thoughtful pedagogical work.

To conclude, educational institutions should not limit themselves to teaching strategies and theories about teaching. They need to allow prospective teachers the opportunity to critically engage with and to reconstruct their personal and professional belief systems, design professional personas, and develop the adaptive confidence needed to teach in multidimensional culturally diverse classrooms.

Technology, media, and the changing nature of 'texts'

In the context of English teaching, the term 'text' has undergone a significant transformation with the advent of technology. Literature no longer includes boundaries of texts such as novels, plays, and poetry. Now, it includes digital storytelling, graphic novels, word videos, interactive fiction, and other multimodal works. This shift, along with the wider educational changes brought about by technology and media, fundamentally changes the ways that students interact with language and stories (Rowse, 2013).

The engagement and understanding of diverse learners have been enhanced through multimodal texts, that is, texts which integrate visual, auditory and written components.

Students familiar with content on social media, video games and multimedia enjoy and benefit from this advance in education. Access to literature is made wide, and along with that, students are encouraged to think critically about the form, the medium and the meaning. The student's analysis of images, sound, and intermingling text fosters their understanding of the construction and intent behind the narrative. This case also illustrates the opportunities but challenges as well. Most teachers, especially those who have been educated in the print-based instruction, find adjusting to these new forms of literacy very challenging. Moving from the canonical, linear text to non-linear, highly interactive media requires rethinking lesson planning, assessment, and, importantly, the objectives of language arts instruction. Teachers themselves have to learn these new digital literacies, usually without enough verification or support from their institutions.

Thus, teacher education programs should not only expose pre-service teachers to new types of texts, but also help them with the necessary tools to analyze and incorporate those texts into lessons. Such a measure would assist in ensuring that English classes no longer become outdated or too focused on a specific group of students in a society where "text" changes constantly and is ever-evolving.

Relevance to teacher education

Notwithstanding recent shifts in education, the two disciplines of literature and language constitute important areas of study in English teacher training. Their relevance, however, needs to be viewed through more adaptive and contextual frameworks which attend to the needs of culturally diverse and technologically rich classrooms. Fives and Gill (2015) have pointed out that the beliefs of pre-service teachers tend to shape deeply, and often in a restrictive manner, interpretive practices regarding the curriculum in terms of classroom roles as text choice and teaching style (Fives & Gill, 2015; Barkhuizen, 2021). This calls for understanding how these future educators perceive these subjects and areas of study beyond the theoretical dimensions for curriculum and instructional Blueprint development.

Alsup (2006) explains identity to be a social construct and reiterates that teacher identity is no exception, stressing how personal and professional facets influence content engagement. The lack of consideration given to the reconciliation of personal belief and institutional expectation as a one whole system in teacher education programs puts undue stress on the graduates of such programs, often leading to a decrease in teaching self-efficacy and early-career burnout (Korthagen, 2017). Poulou (2007) endorse the idea that teaching and self-reflection are vital components of pedagogical responsiveness—described as essential for literature and language studies taught with a well-defined vision of critical, social, and responsive pedagogy.

To foster teaching candidates who are both critically aware and pedagogically adaptable, an attuned reconceptualization of the foundational disciplines is needed to foster pedagogical agency, enabling pre-service teachers to meaningfully adapt content for diverse learners (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023; Scherer et al., 2019). Such an approach will enable pre-

service teachers not only to teach the content, but also to meaningfully interpret, adapt, and personalize it for themselves and their learners.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve a detailed understanding of pre-service English teachers' perceptions of literature and language studies, this study utilized a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) that combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative component began with a structured questionnaire, during which themes and ambiguity were later addressed in semi-structured interviews assigned in the qualitative phase. This two-phase design was chosen to exploit the benefits of both data types.

Participants

The participants for this study were 240 undergraduate students majoring in English Education in Northeastern Thailand. Among the 120 students selected for the quantitative phase, the sample consisted of 88 females (73.33%) and 32 males (26.67%), representing all four academic years (Years 1–4) to ensure a comprehensive developmental perspective.

For the qualitative phase, 20 participants were purposefully selected based on specific response patterns identified in the survey. These "notable patterns" were defined as consistent high or low outliers in key thematic areas, such as participants who reported exceptionally low confidence in teaching classical literature or those who demonstrated a strong preference for digital storytelling integration. These criteria ensured that the follow-up interviews captured a diverse range of critical and divergent viewpoints, moving beyond the statistical average.

Research instruments

Two primary research instruments were used:

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 25 items divided into three thematic sections, each designed to align with the research objectives:

1. *Perceptions Toward Literature and Language Studies*

Example items:

- “Studying literature enhances students’ empathy and critical thinking.”
- “Grammar instruction is essential for student success in communication.”
- “Literature helps students explore different cultures and social issues.”
- “Classical texts remain relevant to modern learners.”
- “Language studies should promote both accuracy and fluency.”

2. *Instructional Beliefs and Digital Integration*

Example items:

- *“Teaching should include both classical texts and contemporary digital texts.”*
- *“I am confident in integrating media (videos, podcasts, etc.) into language arts lessons.”*
- *“Digital storytelling is a valuable method for teaching literature.”*
- *“Technology increases student motivation in language arts classes.”*
- *“Multimodal texts (e.g., graphic novels, films) should be part of literature instruction.”*

3. *Teaching Confidence by Year Level*

Items such as:

- *“I feel confident teaching language arts in a real classroom setting.”*
- *“I am capable of selecting appropriate literary texts for students.”*
- *“I can design lessons that balance grammar instruction and creative expression.”*
- *“I feel prepared to teach literature that reflects students’ cultural backgrounds.”*
- *“I know how to use digital platforms to facilitate literary discussions.”*

Responses were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors “Strongly Disagree” (1) and “Strongly Agree” (5). The questionnaire was constructed from prior assessments of instructional frameworks (Fives & Gill, 2015) and was adjusted based on expert evaluations.

To ensure the content validity of the instrument, the initial draft of the questionnaire was evaluated by a panel of three academic experts. These experts included two specialists in English Language Teaching (ELT) and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation, all of whom hold doctoral degrees and have extensive experience in teacher education.

The validation process involved calculating the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Items with an IOC score below 0.67 were either revised or removed based on the experts’ feedback. Specifically, the questionnaire was refined in several ways:

1. *Clarity of Language:* Several items were simplified to ensure that pre-service teachers, particularly those in earlier years, could accurately interpret the pedagogical terminology.
2. *Contextual Relevance:* Experts recommended adding specific items regarding “Digital Storytelling” and “Multimodal Texts” to better reflect the current educational landscape in Thailand.
3. *Internal Consistency:* Following the expert review, the instrument was pilot-tested with 30 non-participant students, yielding a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.872, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the scales used in this study.

Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was constructed based on the key themes identified in the literature review and the study’s research objectives. The guide consisted of 8 core open-ended questions, supplemented by potential probing questions to elicit deeper insights.

To ensure validity, the interview guide was evaluated by the same panel of three academic experts who reviewed the questionnaire. The experts assessed the items for clarity, pedagogical relevance, and their ability to address the research questions. Based on their feedback, the guide was adjusted in two primary ways:

1. *Question Refinement*: Certain technical terms were replaced with more accessible language to encourage more natural responses during the interview.
2. *Structural Adjustment*: The experts suggested a more logical flow, starting with broad perceptions of literature before moving into specific challenges and technology integration. This validation process ensured that the interview protocol was both rigorous and flexible enough to capture the participants' evolving professional identities.

Sample guiding questions included:

- *"How do you perceive the role of literature in the English classroom today?"*
- *"What challenges do you anticipate in teaching literature to secondary students?"*
- *"Have your perceptions of these subjects changed since entering the program?"*

These guiding questions ensured thematic consistency across participants, while the flexible structure allowed for the use of probing and follow-up questions based on individual responses. This approach provided deeper insight into participants' evolving professional identities and helped contextualize quantitative data through thematic triangulation.

Data collection procedures

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months, specifically from January to February 2025. The quantitative phase began with the distribution of the questionnaire in print format to 120 participants during their scheduled classes. After the initial analysis of the quantitative data, 20 interviewees were selected and contacted for the qualitative phase.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video calls, depending on the participants' convenience. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the participants' pedagogical beliefs and challenges. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' permission for later transcription. All participants gave informed consent, and ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee prior to the start of the data collection process.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (One-way ANOVA) were used to evaluate quantitative data from the questionnaire to investigate variations in perceptions between academic years. Thematic analysis of qualitative interview

data transcribed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) paradigm. Emerging themes were used to correlate the results with the statistical data, and member verification was used to increase credibility (Birt et al., 2016).

Ethical considerations

The study was granted ethical approval by the university's ethics committee prior to the collection of data. Participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their data. Anonymized consent was provided with pseudonyms during transcription and reporting of the data.

RESULTS

The findings from this research are presented in this section in correspondence with the four research questions set to guide the study. Results are accompanied by both quantitative and qualitative data.

Research Objective 1: *To examine pre-service English teachers' perceptions of the educational value of literature in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding.*

Participants recognized value in literature as a pedagogical tool, and quantitative data indicates that they strongly agreed with this statement. The highest scores were found in items related to digital storytelling ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.81$) and the use of diverse and contemporary texts ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.70$). These results suggest that future teachers recognize literature's role in promoting higher-order thinking, emotional engagement, and intercultural understanding.

Table 1. Perceptions toward literature

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Literature builds empathy and critical thinking	4.41	0.72
Literature encourages cultural awareness	4.45	0.68
Use of diverse and contemporary texts	4.49	0.70
Digital storytelling in literature	4.53	0.81
Literature promotes moral reasoning	4.38	0.65
Literature helps students understand global issues	4.34	0.67
Students relate to literary characters/themes	4.25	0.69

These findings are corroborated by qualitative data. Describing literature, participants often referred to it as a 'mirror and window' which enables students to think critically and empathetically about diverse experiences. One interviewee stated, "*Literature helps students make sense of people and emotions—it's more than just reading.*"

Research Objective 2: *To explore pre-service English teachers' beliefs about the role of language studies in developing linguistic competence and communication skills.*

The role of language studies was highly valued, particularly in the context of real-world usage and digital literacy. The highest-rated item in the entire questionnaire was “Digital transformation in language learning” ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.58$), followed closely by “Integration of language and digital tools” ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.61$).

Table 2. Language studies and communication

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Digital transformation in language learning	4.65	0.58
Grammar and vocabulary instruction	4.47	0.72
Language for real-life communication	4.42	0.74
Integration of language and digital tools	4.59	0.61
Grammar should be taught in context	4.47	0.67
Language learning promotes intercultural communication	4.50	0.66
Technology encourages language use beyond the classroom	4.57	0.64
Instruction should balance grammatical form and meaning	4.48	0.70

As for the qualitative comments, participants wanted to discuss how to balance structure and communication within the tasks. They valued grammar, but many stressed the need for more flexible, digital, task-centered approaches to teaching grammar.

Research Objective 3: *To assess the level of confidence and preparedness of pre-service English teachers in teaching literature and language arts in diverse and technology-integrated classrooms.*

Confidence levels varied by academic year. Year 3 students reported the highest mean score ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.46$), followed by Year 4, Year 2, and Year 1. A one-way ANOVA indicated that these differences were statistically significant ($F(3,116) = 2.81$, $p = 0.042$), suggesting that teaching experience and coursework are key factors in building confidence.

Table 3. Confidence in teaching by year level

<i>Year Level</i>	<i>Mean Confidence</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Year 1	4.01	0.87	47
Year 2	4.15	0.66	33
Year 3	4.44	0.46	40
Year 4	4.16	0.71	30

This supports the need for early and continuous exposure to teaching practice and reflective pedagogy, especially in bridging theory with application in real classrooms.

Research Objective 4: *To identify the challenges and factors influencing pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward the integration of literature and language studies in their future teaching practices.*

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework to ensure a rigorous and systematic interpretation of the pre-service teachers' perspectives:

1. *Familiarization*: Transcribing audio recordings and repeatedly reading the data.
2. *Generating Initial Codes*: Assigning labels to relevant phrases related to pedagogical beliefs in both literature and language studies.
3. *Searching for Themes*: Grouping codes into broader patterns of meaning.
4. *Reviewing Themes*: Checking the themes against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represent the participants' voices.
5. *Defining and Naming Themes*: Refining the specifics of each theme (e.g., 'Navigating Literary Empathy' and 'Functional Language Pedagogy').
6. *Producing the Report*: Selecting vivid extract examples and relating them back to the research objectives."

Following the rigorous six-phase thematic analysis process, the rich qualitative data obtained from the in-depth interviews with twenty participants were synthesized into meaningful patterns. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and factors that influence how pre-service English teachers perceive the integration of literature and language studies. The analysis identified several interconnected themes that capture the essence of the participants' pedagogical beliefs and professional identities, as detailed below:

Theme 1: Fostering Critical Awareness and Empathy through Integrated Studies

Theme 1 reflects a foundational belief among participants that literature serves as a powerful catalyst for developing higher-order thinking and human connection. Crucially, participants did not view literature in isolation; instead, they perceived it as a "pragmatic context" that breathes life into linguistic structures, transforming abstract grammar into meaningful human communication.

- 1.1 *Literature as a Catalyst for Critical Thinking and Social Reality*: Pre-service teachers emphasized that literature acts as a bridge to understanding complex social issues and real-world realities. This awareness is a primary driver in their desire to incorporate literary texts into the English language classroom. As one participant articulated:

"Literature is not just a story; it helps students understand the reality of the world and develop critical thinking through language. When we read, we don't just learn vocabulary; we learn how language is used to express deep emotions and social issues."

- 1.2 *Cultivating Human Nature and Empathy*: Beyond cognitive development, participants highlighted literature's unique ability to foster empathy—a dimension they felt was often missing in traditional, grammar-heavy instruction. This humanistic value was seen as essential for a holistic language education:

"I think literature is very important because it teaches us about human nature and empathy. It's not just about grammar; it's about understanding people from different perspectives."

- 1.3 *Balancing Literature with Linguistic Context (Language Component)*: To address the balance between literature and language studies, participants explained how literature provides a necessary anchor for language acquisition. They argued that seeing grammar used in an emotional or narrative context makes linguistic rules more accessible and less intimidating for students. One interviewee shared:

"I feel that literature provides a context for language. It's more than just words on a page; it's how people communicate their feelings and ideas. This makes learning grammar less boring because students see it being used in a real, emotional context."

The analysis of this theme suggests that pre-service teachers' pedagogical choices are driven by the perception that literature and linguistics are mutually reinforcing. Literature provides the "meaningful content," while language studies provide the "analytical tools". For these future educators, integrating the two is not just a method but a goal to create a more impactful and communicative classroom.

Theme 2: Navigating Multimodality in Language and Literacy

Theme 2 illustrates how pre-service teachers perceive the role of digital media and multimodal texts as essential bridges between classical literary content and functional language use. Participants expressed that in the digital era, "text" is no longer confined to printed books but includes a variety of digital forms that reflect how English is communicated in real life.

- 2.1 *Bridging the Gap between Textbooks and Real-World English*: Many participants highlighted that digital media allows students to see the practical application of language, moving beyond decontextualized grammar exercises. They argued that multimodal resources make language studies more "functional" for modern learners. As one interviewee noted:

"I think using digital media like short videos or online texts makes it easier for students to see how English is used in real life, which is better than just a textbook. It's not just about stories; it's about understanding modern communication through different media."

2.2 Enhancing Literary Engagement through Visual and Interactive Media: The digitalization of instruction was also seen as a solution to the perceived "dryness" of classical literature. Participants believed that technology could make literary analysis more interactive and accessible. One participant shared:

"Digital media and technology help students visualize and learn more easily. In my future class, I want to use digital tools to make students feel excited and have fun while learning both the language and the essence of the literature."

2.3 Multimodality as a Tool for Functional Language Learning: A key insight from the interviews was the use of diverse media to teach linguistic components. Participants suggested that using contemporary digital platforms allows for a more natural integration of vocabulary and syntax. An interviewee explained:

"We should use technology to help students interest in the lesson. For example, using online platforms to present literature can help them learn many things alongside English, like new vocabulary and how to use it in daily life."

The findings in this theme indicate that for pre-service teachers, multimodality is the primary vehicle for balancing form and function. By utilizing digital resources, they aim to preserve the depth of literature while ensuring that the language being taught remains relevant and "usable" (Functional) for students in a digitally mediated world. This reflects a shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction to a more student-centered, multimodal pedagogy.

Theme 3: Balancing Formal Linguistic Standards with Contemporary Reality

Theme 3 explores the internal conflict faced by pre-service teachers as they attempt to reconcile the rigid requirements of formal grammar with the informal linguistic realities of the digital age. The findings suggest that while future educators value the "correctness" of English, they are increasingly aware that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to linguistic standards is no longer effective in a multicultural and digitally mediated classroom.

3.1 The Tension Between Formal Grammar and Social Media English: Participants frequently noted the difficulty of teaching traditional linguistic forms to students who are heavily influenced by the informal English found on social media platforms. This creates a pedagogical dilemma regarding which version of the language should be prioritized. As one participant shared:

"Teaching formal grammar is difficult when students are more familiar with informal English from social media. It's a challenge to balance what is 'correct' and what is 'common' in their daily communication."

3.2 Negotiating Accuracy versus Fluency in Classroom Instruction: The interviews revealed a shift in perception toward "Functional Language," where the ability to communicate meaning is seen as just as important as grammatical precision. Participants expressed a

desire to move away from "grammar-obsessed" teaching toward a more balanced model. One interviewee remarked:

"I think it's important to teach both. We can't ignore grammar because it's the foundation, but if we only focus on being correct, students will be afraid to speak. We have to find a way to let them use the language naturally through the stories we read."

3.3 Adapting Classical Standards to Modern Contexts: Participants discussed the challenge of using classical literary texts—which often use archaic or highly formal language—to teach students who operate in a modern linguistic environment. They suggested that the teacher's role is to act as a "linguistic bridge":

"Sometimes the language in old books is too far from how we speak now. My worry is how to make students see the beauty of the language without making them feel that English is impossible to learn because it's so formal."

The analysis of this theme highlights the Linguistic Tension that defines the modern English teacher's identity. Pre-service teachers are moving toward a Translanguaging perspective, where they acknowledge the validity of informal digital English while still aiming to provide students with the formal tools necessary for academic success. This balance is seen as vital for maintaining student interest and ensuring that language learning is both rigorous and relevant.

Theme 4: Pedagogical Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice

The final theme illuminates the practical hurdles and psychological pressures experienced by pre-service teachers as they transition from theoretical academic training to classroom implementation. While participants possessed a strong conceptual understanding of integrated pedagogy, they expressed significant concerns regarding their ability to execute these ideas under real-world constraints, such as limited instructional time and varying levels of student interest.

4.1 The Gap Between Theoretical Knowledge and Classroom Reality: Many participants pointed out a perceived disconnect between the ideal pedagogical models learned in their university courses and the practical difficulties of teaching both language and literature simultaneously. This "theory-practice gap" is a major source of anxiety for future educators. As one participant reflected:

"We learned many theories in our program, but applying them to teach both language and literature in a limited class time is very stressful. I worry if I can actually make the lesson work when I am in front of a real class."

4.2 Managing Time Constraints and Content Density: A recurring challenge identified in the interviews was the struggle to balance the "thickness" or density of literary content with the need for concise language instruction. Participants felt that the extensive nature of

literature often led to student boredom if not managed with high efficiency. One interviewee shared:

"The biggest challenge is managing time. Most literature has long and thick content, which can make students get bored easily. I have to find a way to make the teaching interesting and concise so that they learn the language without losing interest in the story."

4.3 Building Student Engagement in a Complex Learning Environment: Participants emphasized that their self-efficacy is closely tied to their ability to foster student interest. They felt a heavy responsibility to move beyond traditional lecturing to ensure students gain practical knowledge that is applicable to their daily lives. An interviewee explained:

"I feel confident because I plan to use interesting methods, but the real challenge is making sure the knowledge we give them is something they can actually use in their daily lives, not just something they memorize for a test."

The findings in Theme 4 highlight that pedagogical responsiveness is often hindered by structural and environmental factors. For pre-service teachers, the transition to becoming "practitioners" requires more than just content knowledge; it requires the development of adaptive expertise to navigate the stress of real-world teaching. This theme underscores the need for teacher education programs to provide more practical, "hands-on" experiences that simulate these challenges before graduates enter the profession.

In summary, the qualitative exploration of Research Objective 4 reveals a complex interplay of internal beliefs and external constraints that shape pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward integrated pedagogy. The findings indicate that while these future educators are ideologically driven by the humanistic values of literature—such as empathy and critical awareness (*Theme 1*)—they are simultaneously navigating a significant linguistic tension between formal academic standards and the informal English of the digital era (*Theme 3*). A critical factor influencing their attitudes is the perceived utility of multimodality; they view digital and visual media not merely as engagement tools but as essential bridges to teaching functional, real-world language (*Theme 2*).

However, their positive inclinations are tempered by significant pedagogical challenges, most notably the "theory-practice gap" and acute concerns over time management and content density (*Theme 4*). These factors collectively suggest that their readiness to integrate literature and language studies is contingent upon their ability to develop adaptive expertise and digital agency. Ultimately, the transition from being a student to a practitioner involves a continuous negotiation between their personal desire to foster holistic literacy and the structural realities of the contemporary classroom.

DISCUSSION

This study adds to the understanding of how pre-service teachers of English perceive literature as well as language studies in relation to language arts education. Most of the data corroborate educational theory, but the voices of the participants reveal shifts in the teaching priorities driven by today's learning environments.

Reimagining literature in the classroom

The results of this study reinforce an emerging shift among pre-service teachers away from the traditional literary canon toward culturally relevant, multimodal, and developmentally appropriate texts. Most participants identified digital literature—such as podcasts, graphic novels, and online short stories—as more relatable and engaging for contemporary students. This finding aligns with Appleman's (2014) assertion that critically taught literature possesses the potential to foster social consciousness and interrogate hegemonic frameworks. Beyond cultural appreciation, the study highlights that literature serves as a critical linguistic anchor for language studies. While quantitative data indicated high appreciation for literature's role in cultivating empathy—supporting Botelho and Rudman's (2009) multicultural approach—qualitative interviews revealed that pre-service teachers perceive literary texts as "rich linguistic input" that contextualizes complex syntax and semantics.

By integrating literature, these future educators move beyond "grammar-obsessed" instruction toward a model where language is acquired through meaningful contexts, effectively bridging the gap between formal linguistic rules and functional communication. This pedagogical transition reflects Rowsell's (2013) "new literacies" paradigm, which recognizes transmedia storytelling as a meaningful act of creation. Furthermore, as Barkhuizen (2021) suggests, teacher identity is continually negotiated through the integration of personal values and pedagogical content knowledge. However, divided opinions on classical literature reveal an underlying identity conflict; while some participants appreciated the thematic depth of the canon, others viewed it as disconnected from students' lived experiences. This reflects the struggle identified by Alsup (2006), in which novice educators contend with the tension between pedagogical convention and learner-centered practices.

To address these complexities, teacher preparation programs must assist pre-service educators in developing rigorous processes for evaluating texts that are both pedagogically appropriate and culturally relevant. It is recommended that training curricula incorporate both historical and contemporary texts, framed within the dual contexts of critical pedagogy and inclusive teaching to better prepare educators for the diversity of the modern classroom.

The digital era of language studies

Participants showed strong preferences for teaching the language in ways that respond to authentic communicative and online fluency needs. High agreement ratings on the items related to online digital media participation, communication through texts, and the use of technology in grammar and vocabulary teaching evidence this. Specifically, the significantly high mean scores for modern technological tools ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.61$) and digital storytelling ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.81$) suggest that pre-service teachers do not view technology merely as a tool for engagement, but as a fundamental shift in how language is practiced. These findings support Fives and Gill (2015) that posed teachers should be prepared to handle instruction in multilingual and digitally dominated environments.

This transition from traditional to digital pedagogy is not just a change in medium but a necessary shift in linguistic ideology. It reflects what Lantz-Andersson et al. (2018) term "digital agency," where future educators leverage multimodal platforms to bridge the gap between formal grammar and functional, real-world communication. This allows pre-service teachers to act as "meaning-makers" in a digitally mediated world, as proposed by the Multiliteracies framework (Cope & Kalantzis, 2023).

Interestingly, despite this digital shift, some participants appear to be inclined towards grammar-centered instruction. This suggests that more traditional perspectives on language education still exist. This exemplifies Borg's (2003) teacher cognition theory, which argues that personal experiences tend to inform instructional decisions—regardless of contemporary pedagogical insights.

This tension indicates an underlying issue within language education: how to balance communicative teaching with form-focused instruction. An example of how this can be resolved is through Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Functional Grammar, which teaches students grammar in the context of its various uses in different registers and genres. Furthermore, the genre-based approach to writing instruction can provide students with the necessary tools to construct texts effectively in both academic and real-life contexts.

Ultimately, preparation programs need to help novice teachers shift from a structuralist view to more flexible goal-oriented pedagogy. This involves practical task design that reflects authentic communicative challenges and includes, but is not limited to, theoretical input.

Confidence through the years

Patterns in the confidence level analysis over academic years aligned with overarching concepts of professional teacher growth. Third-year students, who had completed coursework in pedagogical theory as well as school-based practicums, reported the highest confidence levels. This reinforces Korthagen's (2017) perspective that identity and self-efficacy development in teachers is anchored in reflection and experiential learning. A striking statistical finding, however, was that third-year students reported significantly higher teaching confidence than their fourth-year counterparts, $F(3, 116) = 2.81$, $p = 0.042$. This decline in self-efficacy as students approach graduation points to a potential "reality shock".

While third-year students may hold more idealistic beliefs, fourth-year students, who are closer to or engaged in teaching practicums, begin to filter their pedagogical knowledge through the lens of institutional constraints and classroom realities. Supporting this, qualitative data from Theme 4 revealed participant concerns regarding time management and content density, suggesting that without adequate practical support, the "undue stress" identified by Korthagen (2017) can hinder the transition from a theoretical student to a responsive practitioner.

In contrast, first-year students appeared the least confident, plausibly because their encounters with classroom realities and pedagogical theory were much more limited. This illustrates Poulou's (2007) emphasis on self-efficacy in the early stages as a guiding factor of a teacher's performance trajectory. Furthermore, this trend can be explained through Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which posits that novice teacher learners are better served by guided, watched, and structured experiences such as peer teaching, micro-teaching, and lesson walks. These trends collectively suggest that curriculum planners for teacher education programs need to address the absence of authentic teaching opportunities earlier in the curriculum. Creating environments that encourage experimentation and reflection helps resolve pre-service teachers' confidence issues more constructively and progressively.

Bridging theory and practice

One interview-related participant observation highlighted the difficulty many participants had in translating their pedagogical beliefs into classroom practice strategies. While most were willing to put effort into teaching literature and encouraging participation, they acknowledged having some doubts regarding actual implementation. This embodies the gap between theory and practice as cited in Creswell (2014) and Allen and Wright (2014).

As explicitly explaining the underlying disconnect with teacher education models gives justification for the need to address issues of practical coursework. For example, TPACK Framework (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) is handy in formidably merging digital tools, instructional approaches, and content knowledge into one cohesive practice. In the same manner, Schön's (2017) Reflective Practice Model motivates continuous self-appraisal which enables the real time modification of one's teaching strategies.

A coherent proposal for change in teaching teacher education courses consists of heavily structured and open-ended experiences like design-based workshops, collaborative lesson planning, and classroom action research. Such approaches are viable for developing the 'adaptive expertise' needed for the complexity of modern language arts teaching when traditional and digital literacies converge.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was the value pre-service English teachers give to literature and language studies in the context of language arts education. The results support the claims of Appleman (2014) and Yandell (2013) regarding the importance of literature in identity development and human relationship, affirming once again that literature is an essential part of language education and self-development. Similarly, participants appreciated language studies as an academic language foundation, as well as for its operational value in digital and face-to-face interactions, among other academic functions, supporting the view of Fives and Gill (2015).

The variation in teaching confidence across years also supports Korthagen's (2017) argument pedagogical development and reflective practice are crucial for developing teacher efficacy. Moreover, the diversity of the views about classical literature and grammar instruction underscores Borg's (2003) teacher cognition framework; that is, the interplay between personal experiences and beliefs strongly influences instructional decisions.

Incorporating the findings as a whole suggests that clearly definable and attainable frameworks should be established for graduate programs and reflectively adaptive digitally fluent educators. Along with confirming Alsup's (2006) research regarding teacher identity, this study underscores the lack of environments where future teachers can reconcile and negotiate their deeply held personal beliefs, competing curriculum expectations, and the lived experiences of students. Through integrated practice and theory, teacher education programs can more adequately prepare teachers for the realities of teaching language arts in contemporary classrooms.

While this study offers valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The sample was restricted to 120 pre-service teachers at a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the data collection in early 2025 provides only a cross-sectional snapshot of perceptions that may evolve as participants enter full-time teaching. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias.

To build upon these findings, future research should consider longitudinal designs to track how "reality shock" influences pedagogical practices over time. Comparative studies across diverse institutional contexts would also provide a broader perspective on teacher identity. Finally, given the high interest in digital integration, future action research should investigate the direct impact of multimodal tools and translanguaging strategies on student engagement and linguistic proficiency in real classroom settings.

Suggestions and implications

The consequences of this research come to life in the development of pre-service English teachers, especially considering the pedagogical changes within language arts teaching. While participants expressed enduring appreciation for the educational value of literature and language studies, they revealed an even greater inability to teach these components in

contemporary classrooms. This gap indicates an imbalance between an understanding of fundamentals and practical applications of teaching in the classroom. It highlights the need for more progress in teacher education systems relative to shifts in student needs, literacy shifts in the contemporary world, as well as spatial, digital learning environments.

Above everything else, restructuring the curricula of teacher education programs requires an emphasis on practice-based learning. Courses must go beyond the traditional canon and include contemporary, multimodal, and culturally relevant texts that reflect learners' media environments. This shift also requires culturally responsive instructional models that TPACK based frameworks for teaching. Such models will enable pre-service teachers to construct pedagogical content knowledge in digitally mediated environments.

Moreover, pedagogical training of greater depth should be offered during the first two years of the program. Low-stakes environments like peer-led workshops and scenario-based instruction offer excellent opportunities to build teaching confidence. As noted by Alsup (2006) and Poulou (2007), these activities are vital in professional development as they enable an instructor's identity formation.

Students should also be encouraged to reflect critically throughout the entire course of study. Reflection on personal belief changes, self-perception, and decision-making within the classroom nurtures a responsive and more stable teacher identity. Identity-driven seminars, structured reflective journals, and digital teaching portfolios enhance the connection between theory and practice.

Lastly, students should be allowed a more flexible and integrative approach when engaging with literary texts. This approach broadens student relevance while preserving the literary heritage of classical texts. Teacher educators should provide gap-bridging scaffolds for cross-cultural and cross-generational discourse to aid constructions of identity development through critical multifaceted lenses.

Overall, the changeover from pre-service to in-service teaching requires support through institutional mentoring, professional development regarding digital pedagogy, and participation in communities of practice. These mechanisms of support can facilitate the shift to teaching in the real world and help harness further development of instructional self-efficacy, creativity, and reflective skills.

As outlined, the author of this study proposes a comprehensive framework of interdisciplinary practice as the center for this gap, supporting cross-disciplinary collaboration with foreign language teacher education, while also suggesting a longitudinal approach through a scaffolding model. Professional development workshops would be part of an integrated set of long-term institutional strategies that promote collaboration on literature and language studies to enhance the quality of English teaching and learning.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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