




## Pre-service teachers' perceptions about English language teaching in rural schools: A qualitative study in a Chilean context

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**Resumen:** Este estudio cualitativo exploró las percepciones de futuros profesores sobre la enseñanza del inglés en escuelas rurales chilenas. Participaron 19 profesores en formación, de entre 20 y 38 años, cursando los últimos años de formación de una carrera de pedagogía en inglés de una universidad privada ubicada en Chillán, Chile. Los datos se recopilaban mediante un cuestionario digital de preguntas abiertas y se analizaron siguiendo un enfoque de análisis temático inductivo. Los resultados indican que, aunque los participantes reconocen diversos desafíos asociados con la enseñanza en escuelas rurales, muestran una marcada disposición a trabajar en estos contextos. De manera importante, las percepciones de los participantes se configuran principalmente a partir de experiencias personales o interacciones sociales, más que de la educación formal. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de sensibilizar sobre los aspectos singulares de la enseñanza del inglés en contextos rurales y de equipar a los futuros docentes con conocimientos teóricos y habilidades prácticas para promover cambios educativos significativos en estos entornos.

**Palabras clave:** enseñanza del inglés- escuelas rurales- profesores en formación- formación docente.

**Abstract:** This qualitative study explored pre-service teachers' perceptions of English language teaching in Chilean rural schools. Nineteen participants, aged 20 to 38, enrolled in the final stages of an English language teaching program at a private university in Chillán, Chile, took part in the study. Data were collected via a digital open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings indicate that, although participants recognized various challenges associated with teaching in rural schools, they expressed a strong willingness to work in these contexts. Importantly, participants' perceptions were primarily shaped by personal experiences or social interactions rather than formal education. These results highlight the importance of raising awareness about the unique aspects of rural English teaching and equipping pre-service teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills to promote meaningful educational change in these settings.

**Keywords:** English language teaching- rural schools- pre-service teachers- teacher education.

## Introduction

In Chile, English language teaching (ELT) research has been explored across various domains. However, the focus on ELT within the context of rural school education remains notably limited. Rural education accounts for 30% of the country's educational institutions (EducarChile, 2022). Recent statistics from the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2023) indicate a substantial presence of 3,247 rural schools, 280,000 students, and 30,837 teachers, predominantly concentrated in the southern regions of the country. According to the Chilean government, these educational institutions are often located far from urban centers, frequently operate with multigrade classrooms, and are characterized by smaller student-teacher communities (MINEDUC, 2022). Recognizing the importance of these rural schools, the Chilean government has introduced a new educational policy known as Plan Gabriela Mistral. This policy aims to address the unique needs of rural education and is designed to enhance the quality of education within these specific settings (MINEDUC, 2023).

Before delving into the topic, it is pertinent to discuss the global perspective on what constitutes rural education. Lizasoain and Becchi (2014) define rural schools as those situated in remote areas, often lacking basic services such as water and electricity and facing a shortage of essential teaching resources like books, computers, and internet access. The authors also note that education in rural settings is typically characterized by limited facilities and a small number of teachers, who are required to cover multiple subjects. Similarly, Du Plessis and Maestry (2019) describe how these challenges extend beyond the schools themselves to affect the inhabitants of rural areas, who must contend with the financial constraints imposed by their respective governments. Hernández Barbosa (2014) further contributes to the complex understanding of *rurality*, arguing that it must be evaluated

from diverse perspectives, including geographical, economic, technological, cultural, and social dimensions. The multifaceted nature of rurality has been explored in research on rural education, revealing challenging conditions for the broader community, including students, educators, and families (Mazzuki & Chiwamba, 2024). While it might be tempting to assert that the challenges of rural education are primarily confined to underdeveloped countries, studies indicate that these difficulties are, in fact, more widespread. Fargas-Malet and Bagley's (2022) scoping review of European rural schools highlights similar issues, including low student and teacher numbers and insufficient funding, which may affect the continuity of these educational institutions.

Research has also examined how the educational community perceives rural education (e.g., Ab Aziz et al., 2019; Nuñez et al., 2021; Pérez-Hernández et al., 2022). Pérez-Hernández et al. (2022) highlight that the multiple constraints faced by rural schools make them less appealing than their urban counterparts. They emphasize that limited economic and instructional resources pose major obstacles to fostering positive perceptions of rural schools and to guaranteeing quality education, particularly in the Colombian context. Similarly, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) argue that inadequate infrastructure and the deteriorating appearance of rural African schools hinder their ability to attract qualified teachers. Based on their qualitative empirical study, the authors contend that teachers are reluctant to work in rural areas due to financial constraints, lack of incentives, and limited resources available in these schools. Hence, educators themselves have negative perceptions about teaching in rural schools as they conceive it as a drawback to their professional development. According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), teachers who are willing to work in rural settings often have personal experiences of living or studying in such areas. Additionally, Ab Aziz et al. (2019) also highlight the unfavorable attitudes of Malaysian English teachers towards rural schools. Beyond citing limited financial and instructional resources, the authors highlight that Malaysian teachers find teaching English in rural schools more stressful than in urban settings. This stress is largely attributed to linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder English learning and lower student motivation. Additional stressors include student misbehavior and heavier workloads.

Regarding access to higher education, Nordholm et al. (2022) found that, in Sweden, although rural school teachers encourage students to pursue tertiary education, educators and staff generally believe that rural students are less likely to continue their studies.

In Chile, research in rural education has primarily concentrated on domains such as teachers' identity (e.g., Balbontín & Rojas, 2022; Laporte, 2007) and the challenges prevalent in rural school education (e.g., Anríquez, 2019; Lizasoain & Becchi, 2014; Lizasoain et al., 2018). However, there is a paucity of investigation from the perspective of English language teaching regarding rural schools and their communities. Anríquez (2019) explored the opportunities and challenges associated with information and communication technology (ICT) by introducing a digital tool for teaching English in a multigrade school. Initially, teachers were hesitant to use the tool, named *It's My Turn*, which was designed to assist non-specialist teachers in teaching the target language. However, with training, support, and reflective practices, the teachers came to recognize the potential of this pedagogical tool for teaching English, a language in which they had limited proficiency. Likewise, Lizasoain and Becchi (2014) also examined the instructional resource *It's my Turn* to evaluate its efficacy in English language learning within a cohort of 35 multigrade primary school students. Despite their limited prior exposure to the program and minimal familiarity with the English language, the authors observed improvements in English language learning through the comparison of pre- and post-test results. While studies on ELT in rural contexts have made valuable contributions, research in this area remains at a developmental stage in a country where rural schools account for nearly 30% of educational institutions. Within this context, several critical issues concerning rural education and ELT in Chile require closer attention, particularly in English education programs and for future generations of English teachers. It is therefore pertinent to examine whether theoretical and empirical perspectives on rural education align with the perceptions of pre-service teachers, especially in

southern Chile, where the rural context plays a prominent role. Accordingly, this study explores the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding ELT in Chilean rural schools, addressing the following research questions:

1. How do EFL pre-service teachers' characterize rural schools?
2. What are EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of ELT in rural schools?
3. What factors influence the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers?
4. What are EFL pre-service teachers' attitudes towards ELT in rural schools?

## Methodology

Based on a qualitative approach, this study explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding English language teaching in Chilean rural schools. Participants were purposefully selected according to the following inclusion criteria: being in the final stages of an English language teaching program (ELTP), having completed most of their practicum coursework, and demonstrating willingness to participate. Students were excluded if they did not provide informed consent or failed to complete the full questionnaire. A total of 19 pre-service teachers (12 men and 7 women), aged between 20 and 38, took part in the study, all of whom met the selection criteria. Notably, the ELTP was situated in a rural area of Ñuble, Chile, which made examining the perceptions of this group of pre-service teachers particularly relevant.

In adherence to ethical guidelines, the researchers obtained approval from the scientific ethics committee of the research site for the implementation of the study. Following approval, the researchers electronically notified pre-service teachers, providing a comprehensive overview of the study without exerting any influence on their responses. Participation was optional, and the study ensured that responses were both confidential and anonymous. The notification email contained a link to access the digital questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section included an informed consent, to be completed with the full name to indicate their agreement to participate. The second section of the questionnaire collected personal details while the third section incorporated seven open-ended questions. These questions were carefully developed by the researchers, drawing on insights from Hampton et al. (2008), who examined pre-service teachers' perceptions of urban schools. Although the focus and design of the present study differ, Hampton et al.'s work provided a relevant methodological and analytical model. To ensure robustness and minimize potential bias, two experienced researchers reviewed the study and questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire was piloted with two pre-service teachers who shared similar characteristics with the study participants. Feedback from this pilot phase informed refinements to the questionnaire's structure.

Data were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2023). The process began with a thorough review of the data to understand its structure and composition. Given the limited sample size, data were managed manually, organized into two primary matrices using spreadsheets. In the first matrix, each of the seven questions was paired with the corresponding responses from each participant. To preserve the authenticity and integrity of the participants' responses, only capitalization and typographical corrections were made; no grammatical or stylistic edits were applied. Once organized, the coding process was streamlined by applying color-coded markers to identify emerging themes within the responses for each question. These codes were subsequently categorized and transferred to a second matrix, aligned with the study's research questions. Coding and categorization were carried out using a cross-checking technique to minimize individual bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Following the data analysis, the researchers devoted special attention to presenting the results. After extensive collaborative discussions, the researchers decided that the findings would be displayed in figures and tables, supported by relevant quotes, as this approach best illustrated the connections between participants' narratives and the emerging themes as well as their alignment with the research questions. Consequently, the results are organized according to each research question, treating them as dimensions to provide a comprehensive description of the findings

## Results

### *Pre-service teachers' characterization of rural schools*

The primary dimension addressed participants' characterization of rural schools. Participants' insights were arranged into the frequency of themes, as illustrated in Figure 1. The predominant theme was 'location'. Many participants described rural schools as educational institutions situated at a distance from urban centers. In this respect, participants explained :

“a rural school is determined where this is located, not very accessible or far from the city”(Participant 8).

“the place. If a school is located in the suburbs, I would not consider it a rural school, but I would consider it if it is in a place very far away where the accessibility is complex” (Participant 2).

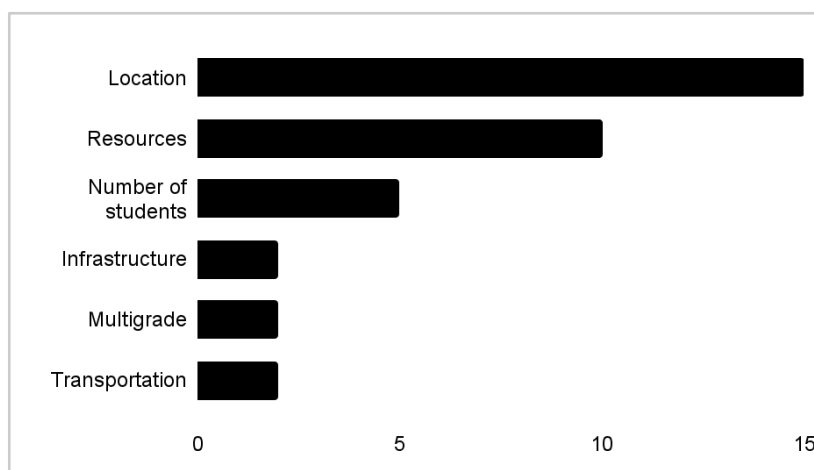
Resources was the second prevalent theme about the characterization of rural schools. Most participants expressed that rural schools are institutions that lack resources. While the term *resources* was commonly used, only three participants explicitly detailed the types of resources they referred to, citing *financial*, *instructional*, and *technological* resources.

The third significant theme was the number of students enrolled in rural schools. Some participants perceive rural schools as having a smaller size and limited student universe, as indicated below:

“rural schools are small with a reduced number of students” (Participant 11).

“I also believe that in rural schools the school population is not much per classroom” (Participant 19).

While less commonly observed, additional characteristics emerged from participants' responses, notably linked to transportation, multigrade classes, and infrastructure as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Participants' characterization of rural schools.

### *Perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers about ELT in rural schools*

This dimension encompasses a substantial portion of the data, covering responses to three specific questions from the participants' questionnaire. As a result, this section explores three primary categories related to ELT in rural schools: instructional resources, disposition to learning, and advantages and disadvantages.

#### *Instructional resources*

Regarding instructional resources intended to enhance ELT in rural settings, the majority of participants emphasized a direct relationship between teaching effectiveness and the economic resources available to schools. This assertion is supported by the following quotes:

“Teachers will use just the teaching resources that the school can afford (Participant 8)”

“...this is connected to the amount of money that just gets to some parts of the country” (Participant 10).

“they [rural schools] do not have much technology and economic resources” (Participant 15).

“I believe that rural schools use the most common resources such as textbooks....flashcards, dictionaries, radio, etc. (Participant 19).

The analysis of participants' responses revealed that a substantial majority believe effective ELT in rural settings largely depends on various instructional resources, including textbooks, worksheets, dictionaries, posters, realia, and a whiteboard, as shown in Figure 2.

Another prevailing characteristic centered on the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This theme exhibited diverse perceptions among participants. While some advocated for the efficacy of ICT as indispensable tools in rural EFL classrooms, others showed more skepticism, questioning their practicality in this particular environment. Highlighting participants' comments in support of the use of ICTs, the following excerpts illustrate the idea:

“I think that teachers use the same teaching resources, but to a minor scale....computers and projectors” (Participant 14)

“I think they [teachers of English] use the projector and digital resources quite a lot (Participant 12)

“I think that...computers and data [projector] are used” (Participant 11).

Conversely, some participants asserted that English teachers in rural education either do not integrate ICT or use it minimally. This reluctance is attributed to the geographical remoteness of schools, as highlighted in the following responses:

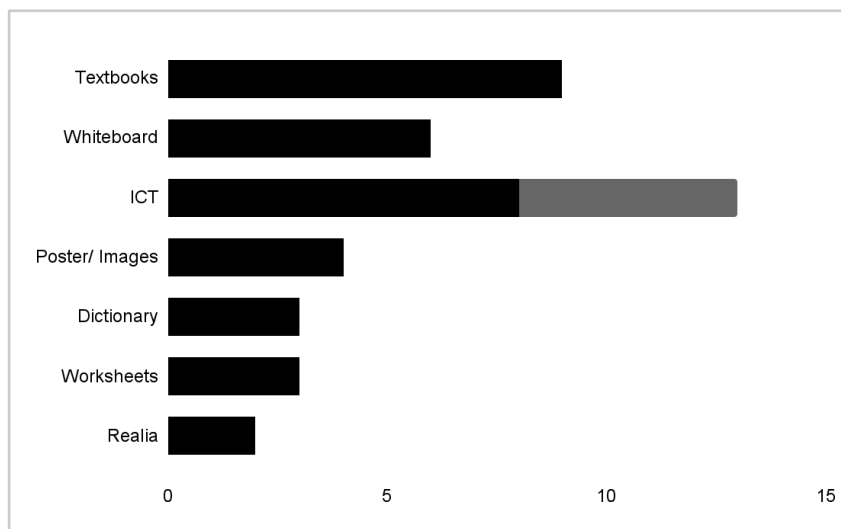
“In some rural locations the connection to the internet is not good, so, English teachers have to use traditional ways of teaching” (Participant 7).

“I think that because they [rural schools] are far away from everything, maybe they do not have many advanced resources to teach” (Participant 16).

“...in the case that there is internet connectivity, ....teachers use these technologies” “...in some places internet connectivity is not available” (Participant 19)

“In rural schools ICTs are not really used as in other schools” (Participant 10).

**Figure 2.** Perceptions of instructional resources used in ELT in rural schools



### *Disposition to learning*

Regarding the student population in rural schools and their attitudes toward learning English, the participants expressed varied perceptions, categorized into four distinct themes (see Figure 3). The most prevalent theme was students' unwillingness or lack of interest in learning English. The majority of participants shared the belief that English is not a priority for learners in rural school as supported in the following comments:

“...there is not a good disposition to learn English, students do not see a point in learning a foreign language that they won't use” (Participant 3)

“students are not willing to learn English as a second language because it is far from their context” (Participant 5)

“English is not actually important for them [students]) (Participant 9).

The second theme in this category, although less frequent, is related to the willingness to learn English. In this respect the participants stated that:

“As far as I know students have a good disposition to learn English although many times they do not understand why they learn it, or the usefulness it has for them” (Participant 17).

“Students in rural schools can be even more willing to learn English compared to other groups. It is my belief that because of the obstacles they [students] face to study such as distance or lack of resources, they have a better disposition to learn (Participant 18).

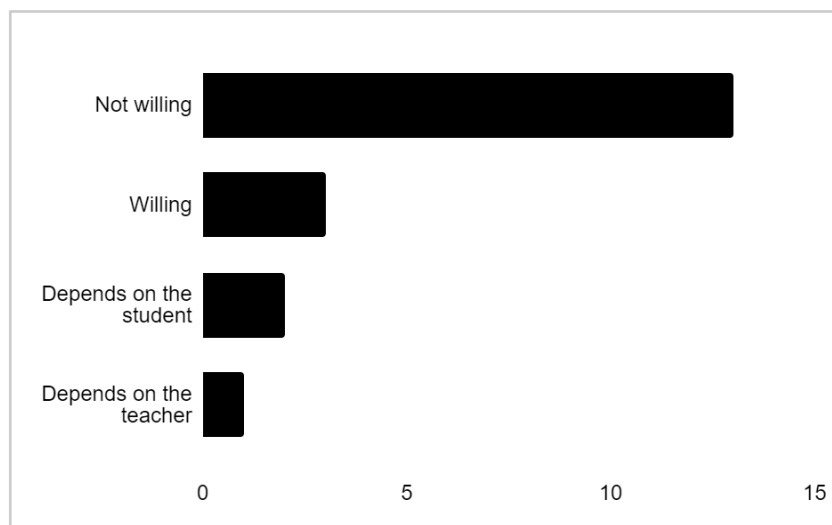
“I think that students in rural schools have a good disposition to learn a foreign language, I think that it [English] calls their attention, the thing is that many times the conditions are not the best...” (Participant 19).

Participants also asserted that the disposition to learning English depends on both the learners and teachers, categorized accordingly in their statements:

“Learning disposition depends on every learner...” (Participant 8).

“Disposition [to English learning] definitely depends on the teacher and the way they teach...” (Participant 7).

**Figure 3.** Perceptions about English language learning disposition in rural schools



### *Advantages and disadvantages*

Participants also addressed advantages and disadvantages about ELT in rural schools. It is worth noting the complexity in organizing this portion of the data as some participants regarded something advantageous, yet for others the same occurrences were appreciated as disadvantages. Consequently, the researchers decided to present this section of the results using a table that contains both categories, advantages and disadvantages, arranged into the underlying themes in each case (see Table 1).

Regarding the advantages, the most frequently highlighted aspect by the participants was the *small class size*. Most participants believed that teaching smaller classes is beneficial for ELT. Other themes that were also addressed included students' disposition to learning and the *teaching approach* (see Table 1).



In terms of the disadvantages, participants perceived two main problems that may hinder ELT. The most notorious themes were coded as *teaching resources* and *disposition to learning* as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Perceived advantages and disadvantages of ELT in rural schools

Advantages	
1. Small class size	<p>-Since there are usually less students per class, teaching can be more personalized and meaningful to students (Participant 2).</p> <p>-One of the advantages of teaching English in a rural school is that having few students makes the path to acquire the language easier (Participant 4).</p> <p>-The advantages may be that learning becomes a much more personalized situation, so students will feel comfortable learning the content (Participant 5).</p> <p>-One advantage is that the student-teacher-parent relationship becomes closer since the number of students who attend is lower compared to the urban area schools (Participant 7).</p> <p>-Dealing with a small group of students, teaching can be better personalized according to the needs of each student (Participant 8).</p> <p>-The advantages may be that perhaps there are different groups of students... that have a connection between content and meaningful learning (Participant 10).</p> <p>-Teaching in some cases could be more personalized for students. (Participant 11).</p> <p>-The advantage is that there are generally small classes and schools with few groups. (Participant 12).</p> <p>-In rural educational establishments there are generally not many students per course, so it would be an advantage (Participant 13).</p> <p>-The advantages, in my opinion, can be working with reduced classes (Participant 17).</p> <p>-Advantages would be a reduced group of students and as a consequence a better reach to each of them (Participant 19).</p>
2. Disposition to learning	<p>-An advantage can be the level of interest that can be generated in students with good learning tools (Participant 1).</p> <p>-The advantage would be the greater disposition that students in rural schools have ...And that is really a positive factor for education (Participant 6).</p> <p>-The advantage may be the willingness to learn (Participant 9).</p>

### 3. Teaching approach

-Both learning and teaching are developed in a deeper and more complete way (Participant 12).

-If the English class was implemented properly. It would have a huge impact in the lives of the students who I teach... knowing their context, planning classes according to their abilities, personal needs and likes can make big changes (participant 14).

-Possibility to use tools that would not fit very big groups (Participant 17).

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### Disadvantages

#### 1. Instructional resources

-The lack of practical uses of English language. The lack of resources is also one of the biggest disadvantages of these establishments (Participant 2).

-The disadvantages I think will always be more influenced by external factors, infrastructure, instructional material, climate, etc (Participant 3).

-One of the main disadvantages that exist when working in a rural school is that when teaching English there are not enough resources that facilitate and help learning English (Participant 4).

-Disadvantage as I mentioned above would be the transfer and the quality of the internet (Participant 6).

-The lack of instructional resources (Participant 8).

-Resources play an important role in the creation of learning materials and tools for students, therefore the teacher may be limited by them (Participant 10).

-The disadvantages would be some of the ones that I mentioned before ... in addition to the fact that the supplies from the schools are sometimes not what is necessary to teach classes (Participant 14).

-The lack of connectivity, especially the internet(... in some cases is taught in precarious conditions (Participant 15).

-Lack of resources (Participant 18).

-The disadvantage would be the lack of instructional resources, perhaps in some situations, to carry out the classes (Participant 19).

#### 2. Disposition to learning

-Lack of interest that, in the worst case, could be generated (Participant 1).

-Lack of student motivation (Participant 2).

-...however, in large courses it would be difficult to create that connection between content and meaningful learning (Participant 10).

-The progress is not much, due to the low participation of the students (Participant 12).

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### *Factors that influence the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers*

Understanding and describing the factors that may have influenced EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions was of utmost importance. This dimension unpacks the various factors identified by the researchers, resulting in five themes arranged by their frequency, as shown in Figure 4. The most frequent factor that shaped participants' responses was *family/friends*. In this sense, some excerpts are highlighted:

“I know some things because I come from a family of teachers” (Participant 1).

“My grandmother worked for many years in rural schools” (Participant 2)

“During my time in primary school, I had classmates who came from rural schools” (Participant 4)

“...my parents always studied in rural schools and even today I have little cousins studying in rural schools” (Participant 7)

“...personal experiences from my social worker and teacher friends who work in rural contexts” (Participant 17).

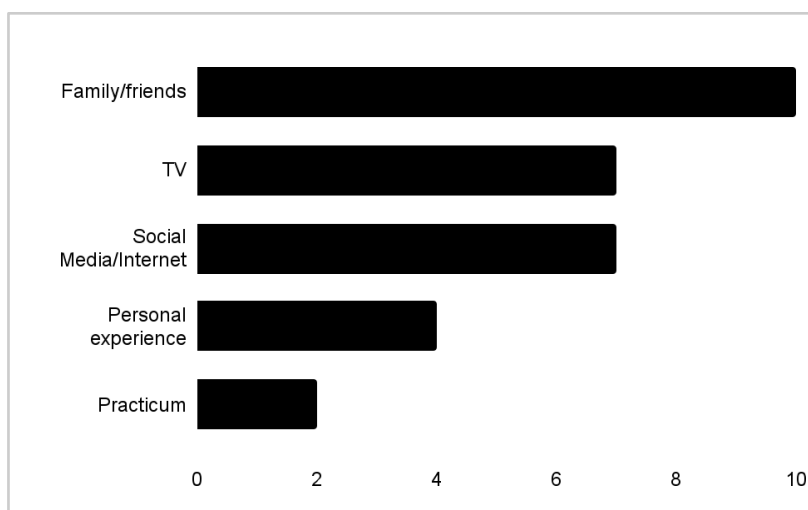
The second most recurrent factor was labeled ‘TV,’ as many participants explained that they had watched Chilean documentaries addressing the topic of rurality and rural schools.

“My perceptions are mainly shaped by TV [programs] that show the reality of rural schools...” (Participant 6).

“My perceptions are based on TV transmissions because sometimes there are documentaries that show the reality of rural educational establishments...” (Participant 8).

Social media and the internet were also factors influencing participants' responses, particularly for those without personal or close experiences in rural education. Additionally, some participants had direct experience with rural education, either as part of their own schooling or through their practicum experiences.

**Figure 4.** Factors that influence participants' perceptions about rural schools



### *Attitudes of EFL pre-service teachers about ELT in rural schools*

Participants' attitudes towards ELT in rural schools were categorized as positive, neutral, and negative. Table 2 illustrates the organization of this segment of the data, aligning each thematic element under its corresponding category for clarity and comparison.

**Table 2:** Participants attitudes towards ELT in rural schools

Positive (15 participants)	Neutral (1 participant)	Negative (3 participants)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching challenge</li> <li>• Transformative agents of change</li> <li>• Strengthening EFL</li> <li>• Strong appreciation</li> <li>• Gaining teaching experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undecided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching challenge</li> <li>• Educational limitations</li> </ul>

The first category, *positive*, was prominent among the majority of participants. A subsequent analysis identified the underlying reasons for these positive attitudes, resulting in five distinct themes. One of the most recurrent themes within the positive attitude category was *teaching challenge*. One participant elucidated this perspective by stating:

“I personally prefer to work in a rural school. It is a challenge, it is something different to teaching in an urban school for reasons like the number of students, less resources, poor accessibility. Teachers working in that [rural] context are closer to their students” (Participant 17).

Participants' positive attitudes also revealed a theme coded as *transformative agents of change*. Many participants believed they could positively impact teaching in rural schools. The following excerpts highlight this perspective:

“...the impact that one can have in rural schools is greater than in urban schools” (Participant 2).

“I can make changes that are meaningful to the lives of the students” (Participant 3).

Another recurring theme that reflected participants' positive attitudes was their commitment to strengthening ELT in rural school education. In this regard, participants asserted:

“I'd like to teach in rural schools, teach students who are interested in expanding their horizons because a language can open a world of opportunities...” (Participant 19).

“I'd like to, I think that rural school students should have the same opportunities as urban school students, I want them to learn the importance and advantages of learning the target language” (Participant 11).

Furthermore, it was established that participants' positive views about ELT in rural schools are closely linked to a *strong appreciation* of the context. For instance, some participants commented:

“Sometimes in urban schools teaching and learning is not as valued as in rural schools” (Participant 3).

“I’d like to teach English in a rural school....because of the humbleness and tranquility of those places” (Participant 4).

Gaining teaching experience emerged as another theme in participants’ responses, as illustrated by the following quotes:

“...it would be beneficial to get to understand the different realities of the students” (Participant 5).

“...I could develop my skills in a more meaningful way, and later I could use them in other contexts” (Participant 10).

“...gaining more experience is never bad” (Participant 18).

Within the neutral category, one participant expressed uncertainty about teaching English in rural schools. Apart from indicating their indecision, the participant did not provide further elaboration or explanation for their standpoint.

Regarding negative attitudes, three participants expressed reluctance to teach English in rural educational settings for various reasons. For instance, one participant noted that the issue of remoteness would pose a significant challenge:

“...the transportation would be a problem for me because it would really make it difficult to get to the school on time” (Participant 6).

Another participant expressed their negative attitude to teaching in rural schools, identifying lack of resources as the main limitation.

“It [ELT in rural schools] doesn’t call my attention that much, because the lack of resources could make my work harder, in other words, it could make meaningful teaching more difficult” (Participant 8).

The third participant in this category expressed negative attitudes related to motivating learners and the challenges affecting rural educational institutions. In the participant's own words:

“I have never thought/considered this option [ELT in rural schools], I think that motivating students could be difficult, considering the context and problems that rural schools could have” (Participant 16).

## Discussion

This study investigated the perceptions of a group of pre-service teachers regarding English language teaching in rural schools. In terms of the characterization of rural schools, participants' perceptions align with the characterizations and findings discussed in the existing literature. Participants' perceptions align with the understanding that rural schools are typically situated at a distance from major urban areas and frequently encounter economic and technological limitations (e.g. Du Plessis & Maestry, 2019; Hernández Barbosa, 2014; Lizasoain & Becchi, 2014; Mazzuki & Chiwamba, 2024; Monk, 2007; Setiawan & Riza, 2023). Participants also noted the number of enrolled students in rural schools, with a consensus that rural classrooms tend to be smaller than those in urban areas. This characteristic has been documented by several researchers and is a common feature of rural schools (Du Plessis & Maestry, 2019; Lizasoain & Becchi, 2014; Monk, 2007), often leading to multigrade classrooms (e.g., Barley, 2009). While some of the participants mentioned a reduced enrollment, only two were aware of the multigrading phenomenon, which is prevalent in Chile (Anríquez, 2019; Lizasoain & Becchi, 2014), particularly in primary education. Furthermore, an interesting observation arises from the fact that while the participants discussed numerous characteristics of rural schools, they did not mention the teacher population working in these settings.

The literature highlights a significant shortage of teachers, particularly highly qualified educators, in rural schools (e.g., Anríquez, 2019; Du Plessis & Maestry, 2019; Khan et al., 2020; Mazzuki, & Chiwamba, 2024). This absence of reference to the teacher population suggests that pre-service teachers might not be fully aware of the challenges within Chilean rural education. Research on English education in rural settings indicates that students often have limited exposure to the language (e.g., Setiawan & Riza, 2023) due to a lack of specialization among teachers. As a result, English is frequently taught using isolated words or with the aid of ICT (e.g., Anríquez, 2019).

In relation to English language teaching in rural schools, participants' perceptions were varied. First, participants demonstrated a thorough understanding of the limitations faced by these schools, particularly regarding economic and technological resources. This shortage often leads to a deficit in instructional resources, a reality well-documented in the literature (e.g., Du Plessis & Maestry, 2019; Saiful, & Triyono, 2018). Second, regarding the use of ICTs, participants expressed diverse viewpoints. Some believed that these tools are not extensively integrated into English lessons in rural settings, while others contended that ICTs are utilized as frequently as in urban schools. Drawing definitive conclusions in this area is challenging, as the integration and use of ICTs in ELT within the Chilean context have not been extensively covered in the literature. Vega et al. (2023) note that despite the existence of a consolidated national policy on ICT use and its curricular integration in school education, there is a paucity of studies systematically investigating its impact on ELT, an area that future studies may explore. Third, participants believe that the disposition toward learning English in rural schools was predominantly negative. A significant portion of the participants believe that students in rural schools lack interest in learning English, viewing it as detached from their immediate contexts. These perspectives align with those of EFL learners, as discussed in the literature, who often perceive English as a challenging or unfamiliar language, with its purpose largely confined to the English classroom (e.g., Du Plessis & Maestry, 2019; Saiful & Triyono, 2018; Setiawan & Riza, 2023). This highlights the need for ELT programs to actively address these perceptions by integrating contextually relevant teaching strategies that can make English more accessible and meaningful for rural students.

Family and friends emerged as the primary sources of information shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions of rural schools. This finding is somewhat surprising, given that the research site itself is located in a rural area serving a region predominantly characterized by rural contexts. Only two participants reported having had direct experience with rural education during their practicum. This highlights the need for teacher education programs to provide future teachers with exposure to the diverse realities of rural schools, integrating both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Additionally, programs should emphasize the positive aspects of working in rural communities, encouraging pre-service teachers to view these contexts as opportunities for meaningful impact (Mazzuki & Chiwamba, 2024). In line with the goal of promoting equity in rural education, Azano and Stewart (2015) stress the critical role of teacher preparation programs in equipping pre-service teachers to navigate the challenges and opportunities inherent in rural schooling.

Despite the observed limitations associated with teaching English in rural schools, participants in this study generally exhibit positive attitudes toward working in rural contexts. This positivity may be linked to the fact that some of these pre-service teachers have either personally experienced rural education or have had close interactions with individuals who shared their rural educational experiences with them. In this respect, the literature emphasizes that teachers working in rural areas are primarily those who have lived in rural environments (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2015; Barley, 2009). This finding suggests that familiarity with rural contexts may play a key role in fostering commitment and enthusiasm for teaching in rural schools, highlighting an important opportunity for teacher education programs to motivate and equip future teachers to engage positively with rural communities.

## Conclusion

Through a qualitative approach, this study found that pre-service teachers' perceptions closely align with the realities of rural school education discussed in the literature. Despite the challenges associated with ELT in rural schools, participants expressed strong interest in working in these settings, viewing the challenges as opportunities for growth and improvement. This optimism appears to stem more from personal experience or social connections than from formal education. This particular finding underscores the importance of incorporating rural education into teacher education curricula and practicums to better prepare future teachers for high-quality practice in these contexts. Future research could expand the scope of this study, using alternative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives and needs related to teaching English in rural settings.

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