

# Exploring Reading Attitudes, Reading Self-Efficacy, and Reading Proficiency in a Blended Learning Context Among EFL Learners

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Affective variables such as second language (L2) reading attitudes (RAs) and L2 reading self-efficacy (RSE) have been regarded as factors which influence academic results in regular face-to-face reading instruction. Research has reported that although positive RAs among adolescents may decline as they go through school, they still engage in diverse formal and informal reading environments involving printed and/or digital resources. These attitudes can be impacted by the sudden change in the way instruction is delivered in blended learning contexts which emerged due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Purpose:** The present study applied a mixed methods approach to explore the relationship between the L2 RAs, L2 RSE, and L2 reading proficiency (RP) of Chilean high school students in a blended-learning context.

**Method:** A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted to gather data from 124 Chilean high school students. The quantitative data collection was carried out by means of two adapted surveys assessing RAs and RSE, while the reading section of the Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to determine the RP of participants. The qualitative aspect of the study involved semi structured interviews with ten participants.

**Results:** Participants displayed moderately positive levels of RA and RSE. Furthermore, a strong correlation was found between RAs and RSE, and RSE was significantly correlated with RP. Qualitative data analysis revealed that the emergency remote teaching context during the pandemic affected student reading behaviour in relation to the attitudes towards recreational digital reading, and that teacher instruction can influence their RAs and RSE.

**Conclusion:** It is essential for EFL teachers to nurture student L2 RSE by means of effective and consistent reading activities with increasing challenge that include synchronous and asynchronous learning. Since most participants preferred to complete reading tasks in a recreational digital setting rather than an academic digital one, teachers should incorporate academic reading activities which are more engaging and contextualised to student age and preferences to effectively use the synchronous and asynchronous time at their disposal in blended settings.

## KEYWORDS

L2 reading attitudes, L2 reading self-efficacy, L2 reading proficiency, emergency remote teaching, EFL learning

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## INTRODUCTION

For many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, reading is a fundamental means to study the language, expand their vocabulary and grammar, and approach foreign cultures (Oh, 2016). Research has addressed the multidimensional nature of L2 reading from a

perspective that considers affective factors such as L2 reading attitudes, defined as the feelings and emotions towards reading (Lee & Schallert, 2014; Yamashita, 2013). In addition, researchers have sought to understand the impact of L2 reading self-efficacy: i.e., the perceived degree of success with which individuals can accomplish a reading task – (Fathi



& Soleimani, 2020; Li & Wang, 2010) on L2 learning. These authors have placed significant importance upon the role of affective variables in learners' L2 reading achievement. For example, attitudes towards learning and beliefs can influence the reading process (Fathi & Soleimani, 2020), since even fluent readers can develop negative attitudes towards reading and choose not to read (McKenna et al., 1995). Day and Bamford (1998) suggested that among the factors contributing to the formation of L2 reading attitudes, the L2 classroom environment is key. Similarly, Yamashita (2013) argued that instructional reading design is fundamental to developing positive L2 reading attitudes among students.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced students to engage in remote learning activities involving a blended learning context. In the emergency online setting prompted by the pandemic, students reported increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression (O'Donoghue et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Thus, the psychological, cognitive, social, and environmental conditions influencing learning must be considered when understanding performance in such contexts (Ismailov & Ono, 2021). School routines, including EFL instruction, had to be rapidly adapted to emergency remote teaching (ERT), defined as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6). The sudden change has prompted educational institutions to adjust their curricula and methods, in such a way that face-to-face learning can be replaced partially (i.e., blended learning courses), or fully (i.e., fully online learning; Cancino & Towle, 2022). Although research reports a lessening in the quality of reading attitudes among students as they complete their schooling. It also suggests that adolescents engage in diverse formal and informal reading environments involving printed and/or digital resources (McKenna et al., 2012), which can also be found in blended learning contexts. This distinction also highlights differences in the performance of students who are identified as poor or struggling readers in a traditional setting, but who display better reading attitudes and outcomes in a digital environment. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the reading purpose of and medium, in order to determine reading attitudes (Conradi et al., 2013). L2 blended learning has been studied mainly at tertiary education levels (Thoms, 2020) since universities and other educational institutions typically offer blended lessons as part of their programs. However, the emergency remote teaching context prompted secondary education institutions to introduce blended learning approaches, in order to reach students in their homes. Examining L2 reading attitudes, L2 reading self-efficacy and L2 reading proficiency in a high school blended learning setting prompted by an emergency remote teaching environment can contribute to understanding L2 reading processes from a perspective that considers affective factors (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021).

## Reading Attitudes (RAs)

The construct of RA derives from an early definition of attitude introduced by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). They conceptualised it as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (p. 6). Research has supported the notion that attitudes are acquired, malleable and the product of numerous experiences involving the object (Miche et al., 2014). More specifically, Artamonova (2020) defines language attitude "as an evaluative view of a particular language held by an individual or a group of individuals regarding any aspect of the language [...] or any combination of aspects inherent to the language or associated with it..." (p. 810). An individual's attitudes towards language arise from diverse aspects such as the sounds of the language and the culture associated with that language. Positive language attitudes can lead to constructive behaviour (i.e., reading) in relation to a language and, in turn, the experiences that arise from this behaviour can reinforce or modify the attitudes towards that language (Artamonova, 2020).

Reading attitudes were initially defined by Alexander and Filler (1976) as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (p. 1). Similarly, Smith (1990) stated that reading attitude is "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that makes reading more or less probable" (p. 215). These reading attitudes are likely to develop from previous experiences at home and in school settings. Both definitions suggest that RAs determine the desire an individual expresses towards the performance of a certain reading task. In addition, formal or informal learning experiences are fundamental to the creation of such RAs and hence, the behaviour a learner presents towards reading. Regarding the constituents of RAs, several authors agree that they comprise affective, behavioural, and cognitive aspects (Lee & Schallert, 2014; Matthewson, 1994; McKenna et al., 1995; McKenna et al., 2012). In addition, RAs have been found to develop from four main reading experiences linked to the purpose (academic or recreational) and the medium (print or digital) for a reading activity (McKenna et al., 2012; Conradi et al., 2014).

RAs have been linked to motivation (Schiefele et al., 2012) and reading achievement (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). Jang et al. (2015) stated that reading attitudes along with other concepts such as reading self-efficacy, interest, and self-concept are motivational factors which configure an individual's motivation for learning. Focusing on the acquisition and development of L2 RAs, Day and Bamford (1998) developed a model with four sources contributing to the formation of L2 reading attitudes: L1 reading attitudes, previous L2 reading experiences, attitudes towards the L2 and the related culture and people (language attitudes), and L2 classroom environ-

ment. In line with this model, Crawford (2001) found that the amount of L1 reading done, the experiences abroad, and the instructional setting predicted the L2 RAs of 182 Italian adult EFL learners. Ro and Chen (2014) replicated the study with 60 advanced EFL learners and found that learners with positive RAs tend to read more, but that previous experience in the target language culture and previous English study did not predict reading habits and attitudes. These studies highlight the dynamic nature L2 RAs in relation to factors such as previous experiences with the language, reading habits, and the instructional setting. Focusing on the impact of the type of L2 reading approach, Yamashita (2013) found that a 15-week extensive reading course had a positive influence on the feelings and emotions of 61 Japanese undergraduate EFL learner. She also found that the reading sessions helped increase comfort and intellectual value among university students towards L2 reading, while decreasing L2 reading anxiety. Similarly, Lee et al. (2015) studied 124 adolescent EFL Korean learners and the effects that extensive reading had on their RAs and grammar knowledge when compared to a regular translation method. Participants' responses to linguistic tests and attitude surveys revealed that both forms of reading instruction yielded positive grammar knowledge gains, and that extensive reading decreased positive RAs in low proficiency students and increased them in higher-level students. Finally, Lee and Schallert (2014) investigated the contributions of L2 RAs and language proficiency to the reading achievement of 289 South Korean middle school students. They found that L2 proficiency was associated with positive RAs and fewer negative feelings about reading in the language. In addition, factors such as access to books, length of private instruction, teachers' encouragement, and gender predicted the nature of L2 reading attitudes. These results suggest that the development of positive L2 RAs can be mediated by contextual and cognitive factors.

### Reading Self-Efficacy (RSE)

Self-efficacy can be defined as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In educational settings, research has shown that self-efficacy is a major factor influencing learner interest, persistence in learning, goal setting, and self-regulation (Raofi et al., 2012). More specifically, self-efficacy in foreign language learning affects learner performance in various language domains and can predict L2 achievement (Hsieh & Kang 2010; Mills et al., 2006). Self-efficacy has been addressed in relation to specific L2 language skills, such as reading self-efficacy (RSE) – that is, the perceived degree of success with which individuals can accomplish a reading task – (Fathi & Soleimani, 2020; Li & Wang, 2010). For example, Mills et al. (2006) conducted research on the impact of L2 RSE and L2 reading anxiety on the L2 reading and listening proficiency of 95 university students enrolled in French courses at a university in the United States. Results indicated that there was

a significant relationship between RSE and reading proficiency. Participants who reported higher RSE achieved higher scores in reading proficiency tests. That is, students who perceived themselves as good readers were more likely to be proficient readers, results that are in line with Oh (2016).

Focusing on L2 reading strategies, Li and Wang (2010) investigated the relationship between L2 RSE and L2 reading strategy use among 182 Chinese sophomore English majors. Findings revealed that students with higher L2 RSE used more reading strategies in comparison to less self-efficacious readers. The type of instruction style adopted is also a relevant variable in the development of RSE. Fathi and Soleimani (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 48 Iranian young learners, in order to assess gains in L2 reading attitudes and L2 RSE after a 12-week treatment involving a cognitive approach to reading instruction. The results indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group by increasing their L2 RSE. Neither of the groups reported any positive changes in their L2 RAs, leading the researchers to conclude that RAs are likely to develop over longer periods of time. Overall, the literature discussed above suggests that L2 RAs and L2 RSE are related to previous reading experiences, reading instruction, and strategy use, and can thus influence reading proficiency and achievement.

### The Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) Context

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, government restrictions forced schools to modify their instructional setting. Many students completed their schooling under the modality of blended lessons, i.e., some classes were held face-to-face at school and others were delivered online through asynchronous tasks (Grgurović, 2017). In online and blended learning settings, the use of learning management systems proved to be useful regarding course organisation, student interaction, and performance (Francom, 2020). Computer mediated communication also gained relevance as video conference software tools such as Zoom were used to maintain remote interaction (Lowenthal et al., 2020). Alternative approaches to maintaining communication such as asynchronous videos were also utilised since some institutions sought to reduce the stress that implied spending many hours in synchronous sessions (Lowenthal et al., 2020). Indeed, emotional aspects related to stress and the well-being of students have been considered to evaluate the effectiveness of an ERT approach. Learners have reported anxiety and stress in online learning settings (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021), leading them to lose motivation and fail classes during the pandemic (de Souza et al., 2020). Reading, just as any other aspect of language learning, has affective components (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) such as reading attitudes and reading self-efficacy which can influence reading performance (Fathi & Soleimani, 2020). The role which those affective variables

play in engaging individuals in L2 reading has earned greater recognition (Bernhardt, 2010; Lee & Schallert, 2014). In ERT online learning contexts, addressing these variables is essential to understanding how learners have experienced significant levels of anxiety, stress, and depression because of the pandemic (Yang et al., 2021). L2 reading attitudes in online settings might differ from face-to-face L2 reading attitudes due to the differences in teacher rapport (Fithriani & Alharbi, 2021). Furthermore, the reading self-efficacy beliefs of students can be affected by the current need of employing digital sources of information and instruction, as reading digital resources presents distinct challenges when compared to reading printed resources. In blended learning settings, it becomes relevant to acknowledge students' feelings, emotions, and perceptions of self-concept towards a reading situation, since these students may have developed attitudes during the ERT context that shaped their learning behaviours. Thus, the present study sought to apply a mixed methods approach to explore the perceived L2 reading attitudes (RAs) and L2 reading self-efficacy (RSE) beliefs of 124 high school EFL learners in a blended learning context, and to establish relationships between those variables and L2 reading proficiency (RP) in such context. The following research question is addressed:

How are the L2 reading attitudes and L2 reading self-efficacy beliefs of ELF learners related to L2 reading proficiency in a blended learning context?

## METHOD

### Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was followed. Quantitative data was gathered from participants which was then further enriched through the gathering of qualitative data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). The quantitative data collection was carried out by means of two adapted surveys assessing RAs (Conradi et al., 2013) and RSE (Wang et al., 2014). In addition, the reading section of a language proficiency test (Preliminary English Test PET) was administered to determine reading proficiency. The qualitative aspect of the study involved semi structured interviews with ten participants.

### Participants and Context

The study was carried out with 16-17-year-old high school students in Chile. Since one of the researchers had access to a secondary educational institution, convenience sampling was used in the quantitative stage. The participants were 124 (65 females, 59 males) 11th graders who had transitioned from a face-to-face learning delivery setting (with six weekly hours of EFL instruction) to a blended learning context in 2021. The blended method involved alternating

between one week with two hours of synchronous online lessons, and one week with two hours of face-to-face lessons. In addition to the lesson design, task completion, and assessment issues encountered due to reduced instruction time, reading activities during class were limited by the context. The use of face masks and physical distancing in face-to-face lessons prompted teachers to restrict activities to individual tasks or group activities with scarce interaction among peers. In addition, lessons were shortened for teachers to comply with the school schedule and the Ministry of Education's requirements. Purposeful sampling was used to identify ten students with specific RA and RSE profiles that completed the semi-structured interviews.

## Instruments and Materials

### *Survey for Adolescent Reading Attitudes (SARA)*

The instrument used to measure students' L2 reading attitudes was an adapted version of McKenna et al.'s (2012) survey for adolescent reading attitudes (SARA). The SARA was originally designed to assess L1 reading attitudes of adolescent learners. It contains 18 items addressing reading attitudes towards four components: academic print ("How do you feel about reading a novel for class?"), academic digital ("How do you feel about reading news online for a class?"), recreational print ("How do you feel about reading a book in your free time?"), and recreational digital ("How do you feel about texting or emailing friends in your free time?"). Each answer was scored by using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("very bad") to 6 ("very good"). The SARA survey has been validated in studies assessing reading attitudes in adolescents (Conradi et al., 2013; Wang & Jin, 2020) and good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  over 0.72 for the components and over 0.85 for the total scale) was reported. The SARA survey was translated into Spanish, the first language of the participants (see appendix A). Back translations were performed by another researcher who proposed changes to the grammar of the items that improved the adaptation before submitting it to the pilot procedures.

### *Reading Component of Questionnaire of English Self-Efficacy (QESE)*

Reading self-efficacy (RSE) was assessed by means of a component in the questionnaire of English self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2014). The 32-item survey was created to assess self-efficacy in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In this study, only the eight items contributing to the reading self-efficacy component were included (e.g., "Can you understand new reading materials selected by your English instructor?"). The eight items included in the reading component presented a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 ("I cannot do it at all") to 7 ("I can do it very well"). Each item begins with the phrase "Can you...?" to measure stu-

dents' perceptions regarding their capability rather than the intention of performing certain actions (Bandura, 2006). As with the SARA survey, the items in the RSE component underwent a process of translation and back translation (the adapted instrument can be seen in appendix B). Wang et al. (2014) reported optimal internal consistency for the instrument (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

### **Reading Comprehension Section of Preliminary English Test (PET)**

In order to measure the level of L2 reading proficiency (L2 RP) among students, the reading comprehension section of the Preliminary English Test (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2014) was administered. This test assesses the four language skills at an intermediate B1-B2 level (Common European Framework of References for Languages). The reading section includes 35 items divided in five different sections addressing reading comprehension and the use of vocabulary in context. Although instructions for the completion of the test were given in Spanish, instructions for each section and the items were presented in their original L2 format.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask participants for additional information and take the conversation to a point that is of interest to the topic. This can deepen the understanding of the quantitative data gathered with adolescent learners. The interview protocol included main general questions addressing specific data collected in the SARA and the QESE reading component. The questions examined factors influencing behaviours towards reading (e.g., "What experiences have negatively or positively impacted the way you feel when you read in English? Why?"). The interviews were conducted in Spanish to prevent the L2 from negatively impacting participants' thinking processes. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in the analysis.

## **Procedures**

### **Pilot Study Procedures**

The SARA, the QESE reading component, and the reading section of the PET were piloted with a group of 15 students in 11th grade who completed the instrument via a Google Forms link, the format chosen for the study. No major comprehension issues were reported by the participants regarding the surveys, and the interface of the reading section of the PET was fixed after students reported they had to scroll up and down frequently to read a text and answer questions. The semi-structured interview protocol was piloted with two students via Zoom to assess the length of the session and organise the topics in the interview.

### **Data Collection and Method of Data Analysis**

Since the participants were 16-17-year-old high school students, informed consent was obtained from their parents before securing the participants' assent. An information sheet outlining the study was sent to the participants' parents. They were told that all the information collected would remain anonymous, and that neither the names of the participants nor their personal information would be published or shared. Once consent and assent were secured, the researchers asked the participants to enter a computer lab where they could access a Google Forms link to the SARA and the QESE reading component. The same procedures were carried out for the completion of the reading component of the PET, two weeks later.

Regarding the semi-structured interview selection procedures, the participants were chosen based on their survey data profiles. The scores in the SARA were grouped following guidelines from Conradi et al. (2013), identifying low (1-2.9), medium (3-4), and high (4.1-6) RA levels. These guidelines were also adapted for the RSE component in the QESE (Wang et al., 2014), where scores were categorised as low (1-2.9), medium (3-5), and high (5.1-7). Finally, the reading PET results were categorised as low (A1-A2) and high (B1-B2), according to Cambridge Assessment. This process resulted in the identification of ten participants who displayed four distinct profiles: medium RA, low RSE and high RP (three participants); high RA, high RSE and high RP (three participants); medium RA, low RSE, low RP (two participants); and high RA, high RSE and low RP (two participants). The parents of the ten participants were individually contacted via e-mail so that they could give their consent for the interviews, which were conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 35 minutes. Table 1 presents the profiles of the interview participants.

With regard to the method of analysis for the quantitative data, descriptive analysis (means and standard deviation), and inferential statistics (correlational analysis between RA, RSE, and RP) were carried out with the survey data on SPSS v27 (IBM Corp., 2020). Cronbach's alpha values for the SARA components and the QESE reading component were optimal ( $\alpha > .819$ ), which suggests good reliability and confirms previous values provided in the literature. As for qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis was used, since this approach allows for the identification, analysis, organisation, description, and reporting of themes found in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis also prompts the researcher to examine participants' perceptions by highlighting similarities and differences among their opinions and generating unanticipated insights (King, 2004). Six steps were followed by means of an iterative and reflective approach to the analysis of data, based on Nowell et al. (2017): familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for codes, reviewing the data, defining themes, and naming them.

**Table 1**  
*Profiles of Participants for the Semi-structured Interviews*

Participant	Gender	Age	Reading Attitude	Reading Self-efficacy	Reading Proficiency
Andrés	Male	17	Medium	Low	High
Ivania	Female	17	Medium	Low	High
José	Male	16	Medium	Low	High
Rania	Female	16	High	High	High
Luisa	Female	16	High	High	High
Diana	Female	16	High	High	High
Camila	Female	16	Medium	Low	Low
Javiera	Female	17	Medium	Low	Low
Pedro	Male	16	High	High	Low
María	Female	16	High	High	Low

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Results

#### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the SARA dimensions (academic print, academic digital, recreational print, and recreational digital), the QESE reading component, and the reading PET.

The lowest means were found in the academic digital ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 1$ ) and the academic print ( $M = 4.25$ ;  $SD = .94$ ) components. Higher means were observed for the recreational print ( $M = 4.67$ ;  $SD = 1.03$ ) and recreational digital ( $M = 4.81$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ) components. Students displayed more positive attitudes towards the recreational components of reading attitudes, rather than the academic ones. This is confirmed by the percentage of positive responses to items in the recreational print component (“How do you feel about getting a book or a magazine in English for a present?” with 87%) and the recreational digital component (“How do you feel about using social media in English in your free time?” with 89%).

The RSE scores displayed a moderately high mean ( $M = 5.18$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ). The item with the highest percentage of positive perceptions was found in the item: “Can you read short English narratives?” (78%). Finally, results for the proficiency test revealed that learners displayed an average A2 level ( $M = 21.19$ ;  $SD = 7.35$ ).

#### Inferential Statistics

The data for all relevant components were tested for normality. Although kurtosis and skewness values suggested normality, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test was significant in all the measures but the academic digital component. We then conducted both Pearson’s  $r$  and Spearman’s  $\rho$  correlations with the data, with the results being nearly identical regarding significance values and correlation strength. Thus, we kept Pearson’s  $r$  results to identify relationships between the SARA components, RSE, and reading proficiency (Table 3). The interpretation of the correlation coefficients was done following Oswald and Plonsky’s (2010) guidelines, with  $r = 0.25$  signifying a low correlation,  $r = 0.40$  being a moderate correlation, and  $r = 0.60$  indicating a high correlation.

Results revealed significant strong positive correlations between L2 reading RSE and all the L2 reading attitudes components. The highest of such correlations was found between L2 RSE and recreational print ( $r = .715$ ;  $p = .000$ ). A low but significant correlation was found between L2 reading proficiency and the recreational print component ( $r = .193$ ;  $p = .031$ ). Finally, a low but significant correlation was found between L2 RSE and L2 reading proficiency ( $r = .266$ ;  $p = .003$ ).

#### Qualitative Results

Four main themes were identified in the semi-structured interviews: Reading attitudes in the blended learning context; reading habits, reading attitudes and the teacher; reading

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for SARA, QESE Reading Component, and Reading PET (n = 124)*

Variable	Mean	SD
Academic print	4.25	.94
Academic digital	4.16	1
Recreational print	4.67	1.03
Recreational digital	4.81	1.05
Total SARA score	4.44	.88
QESE reading component	5.18	1.14
Reading PET	21.19	7.35

**Table 3***Correlations between Reading Proficiency, Reading Attitudes, and Reading Self-efficacy*

Variable	L2 RP	AP	AD	RP	RD	TRA	RSE
L2 RP	1						
AP	,093 ,306	1					
AD	,097 ,284	,886* ,000	1				
RP	,193* ,031	,732* ,000	,637* ,000	1			
RD	,174 ,053	,622* ,000	,564* ,000	,712* ,000	1		
TSARA	,155 ,085	,934* ,000	,894* ,000	,882* ,000	,790* ,000	1	
RSE	,266* ,003	,613* ,000	,656* ,000	,715* ,000	,655* ,000	,749* ,000	1

Note. L2 RP = L2 reading proficiency; AP = Academic Print; AD = Academic Digital; RP = Recreational Print; RD = Recreational Digital; TSARA = Total SARA; RSE = Reading Self-efficacy.

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

attitudes; and reading self-efficacy. Overall, students enjoyed spending time reading from digital sources in the L2 such as social media, song lyrics and movies, and aspects such as teacher encouragement and the type of instruction approach were crucial in their development of L2 reading attitudes and reading self-efficacy.

### **Reading Attitudes in the Blended Learning Context**

Participants perceived that online lessons were different from in-person classes and that they influenced their attitudes towards reading. According to the quantitative results, the academic digital reading dimension had the lowest scores in the survey. This might be attributed to the de-

creased interaction among peers, reduced class periods and reduced reading time in the L2. Rania referred to blended learning classes as follows:

With the pandemic, we started online classes and my teachers had been changed. It was more difficult with the online classes. I felt that we didn't practice much. Sometimes the teacher started a conversation, and one could answer in English, but we lost that with online classes.

Rania considered that the online setting for learning was less favourable because the interaction with her teachers and peers was reduced. Therefore, opportunities for nurturing aspects such as general L2 reading proficiency was affected by the reduced socialisation among students during reading tasks. In addition, the adapted schedules and

school timetables negatively impacted students' perceptions of blended learning classes. Rania also stated:

With the pandemic, classes were reduced in length. We went from having six (face-to-face) hours a week, to having two. We didn't have the time to do much.

José expressed that in the blended context, academic reading had been mainly focused on reading texts on Google Forms, completing Google Forms activities, and taking online tests:

I haven't read much on paper, I've read longer texts on the internet, and I've read the Google forms tests we've taken.

Diana displayed a negative view of reading the news in English as an academic task:

Sometimes there are topics that I am not very interested in, and in the test, we always have to read texts like those and not all of them interest me.

In contrast, María stated:

At school we always have to read pieces of news or articles that are important, and I have practiced with those.

José and Diana display high levels of reading proficiency, while María does not. Interestingly, these extracts suggest that academic activities involving reading were perceived as more useful for the learner who was less proficient, regardless of the medium of delivery.

### **Reading Habits**

Students reported that reading at school in a pre-emergency remote teaching context consisted of engaging in reading activities involving textbooks and books. In a blended learning context, reading routines changed by having to read online news and short texts related to test-taking activities. Participants expressed that reading at school was mainly done to achieve academic goals, rather than recreational ones. For example, Ivania stated:

To be honest I don't read for school. I mean, I only read the things I'm assigned... things like tests and activities.

Low reading proficiency learners perceive they are not avid readers, which is related to their reading comprehension skills:

Ivania: "I like short texts, like those that have like three lines... I can read those, but in others tests I have read texts that are too long and that is difficult for me."

Andrés: "I like short and simple texts to begin my reading and later, continue with more difficult things."

Participants stated that printed sources as extensive reading tasks were not typically part of the reading habits encouraged by their teachers:

Rania: "We don't have (extensive reading activities) in the English class... We have the typical texts in preparation for

tests. When we have tests, there's always a part that has a text."

Andrés: "In class, we sometimes read the news or short tales, but mostly the news. It's what we usually do."

In contrast with students' paper-based reading habits, participants reported very positive views towards reading digital sources of information for fun:

María: "I like reading song lyrics. For example, on Spotify I can read the lyrics there. I can also watch movies with subtitles."

Camila: "I like reading movie reviews and I also like reading about old music. I think it's interesting. Most of the music I listen to is in English, so I like reading interviews with some of the bands I like... It's the same with movie reviews. The majority of critics that I like are English speakers."

### **Reading Attitudes and the Teacher**

Students' L2 reading instruction was a relevant topic which emerged from the interviews and had a major influence on their perceptions of L2 reading attitudes and L2 reading self-efficacy. Consequently, students' perspectives of their own L2 reading attitudes and L2 reading self-efficacy are highly influenced by teacher methodologies in face-to-face and blended learning contexts, and could result in positive or negative perceptions. Teacher encouragement in general EFL tasks helped them to feel motivated and capable of improving their reading skills:

Luisa: "Teachers have always helped us to improve or to like what we don't like. I have a good relationship with my English teachers and every time I have needed them, or If I haven't understood something (when I read), they have helped me to understand and improve."

Javiera: "I remember this time when I didn't have a group to work with, so I wrote a piece of news about my favourite music band and read it out loud for my teacher. He awarded me a great grade and congratulated me. He told me that I had done a great job and that my pronunciation had improved a lot. I felt motivated."

Pedro mentioned that he felt confident and capable of reading in English based on the techniques his teachers had adopted in the past:

When I was in 9th grade, my teacher made us sing during classes, so we didn't feel afraid of talking or reading out loud in front of our classmates, nor feel nervous.

### **Reading Attitudes and Reading Self-Efficacy**

Students reported that their sense of competence in reading tasks (L2 RSE) was influenced by their peers' abilities and how they perceived themselves when comparing their proficiency. The following extracts suggest that when participants were able to perform a reading task successfully, but their peers could not, they felt highly capable of reading in English. Rania stated:

I trust myself. I have compared myself with my surroundings ... I don't know if that's good, but I think that based on that I feel talented. I know I can understand English.

In line with this, Luisa reported a low sense of self-efficacy when her peers achieved successful task completion:

Well, sometimes when I am with coursemates that have better grades than I, I may feel less capable. It's just certain things that make me feel less capable, for example when I am next to really proficient people.

Similarly, María expressed that her efficacy beliefs have changed positively through her years at school and that she realised this by contrasting her performance with their peers:

Before, it was harder... I felt that I was at a lower level compared to my classmates because they had a good base of English and I had nothing, so it was like: Oh no! I would have liked to have that level. At that time, I felt less capable.

Participants perceived that there was a relationship between how capable they felt in reading a text in English and the feelings or emotions they experienced when reading a text:

Javiera: "If I feel very capable of reading in English, I think my emotions aren't going to be of nervousness or anxiety. I am going to be calm because I know that I am going to do a good job."

María: "Everything is related to how I feel, because if I feel confident about reading, I will understand what I'm reading better."

## DISCUSSION

The research question put forward sought to assess how EFL learners' L2 reading attitudes and L2 reading self-efficacy beliefs were related to L2 reading proficiency in a blended learning context. Quantitative findings revealed that the L2 reading attitudes of the participants were moderately positive, with the recreational academic and recreational digital components displaying the highest mean scores. The high level of reading attitudes in the recreational components has been reported in the literature even with lower levels of proficiency (Park, 2020). Regarding L2 reading self-efficacy, the participants displayed overall positive beliefs towards reading, which have been associated with frequent use of reading strategies and better reading comprehension (Liao & Wang, 2018). For example, participants in this study displayed positive attitudes towards using a dictionary in the classroom (academic print) and looking for information online (academic digital) and thus may do better at performing reading tasks (Genç et al., 2016). As Bandura (1997) stated, successful completion of a previous task can influence self-efficacy. Regarding the correlations with the data, strong relationships between all the components of L2 reading attitude and L2 reading self-efficacy were identified. If a student perceives that a text is understandable and that reading will be successful (positive self-efficacy beliefs), reading attitudes are likely to be positive, and motivation will increase when reading the text. L2 reading attitude and

L2 reading self-efficacy depend on each other, as a learner might first estimate their degree of self-efficacy in order to complete a reading task (Jang et al., 2015). The low but significant relationship between L2 reading self-efficacy and L2 reading proficiency found confirms to some extent previous findings suggesting that reading self-efficacy will tend to increase reading proficiency even in low proficiency readers (Liao & Wang, 2018; Mills et al., 2006). Finally, the weak relationship between L2 reading proficiency and the recreational print component of reading attitudes contrasts Lee and Schallert's (2014) results, who reported a strong relationship between reading achievement and reading attitude. In the present study, data from the SARA instrument showed that students were very positive about actions such as receiving a book or a magazine in English as a present. This also suggests that they would welcome activities involving paper-based texts in a blended school context.

Qualitative data further examined perceptions among participants and revealed that they perceived online lessons in a blended learning context as different from face-to-face classes and that this influenced their attitudes towards reading. The online setting for learning was less favourable because the interaction with teachers and peers was reduced. This is a common element in remote lessons. It can affect instruction, learning and the development of social and academic abilities (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Tang et al., 2020). The reduced number of face-to-face hours was a factor which impinged upon L2 reading during remote lessons in the selected context. Students reported reading pieces of news or articles for school and having mixed feelings towards them, which is related to Lee et al.'s (2015) notion that successful approaches to reading may depend on a learner's language proficiency level. Furthermore, the mindset in relation to reading texts from coursebooks might have affected learners' perceptions of the importance of such activities in a blended learning setting. Indeed, these participants perceived that distance asynchronous learning was an additional activity that did not constitute learning itself. Fithriani and Alharbi (2021) assert that this is common in blended learning contexts, as two distinct communities are created: the community of face-to-face interaction and the online community. In this case, the online community was seen by participants as a space for the completion of activities and responding to tests, rather than a space for nurturing reading.

In terms of reading habits, these learners did not read books as part of an extensive reading program. Studies have suggested that when English resources are available to learners, they are likely to build positive attitudes towards L2 reading (Crawford, 2001; Ro & Chen, 2014). In the present study, the amount of academic reading done by students displaying high reading proficiency was insufficient. Students reported they typically had to read online news and short texts relat-

ed to test-taking activities as part of online classes. In other words, the reading tasks in the blended learning setting were mainly done to achieve academic goals, rather than recreational ones. This may explain learners' perceptions towards the academic digital component, the lowest score in the survey. Regarding L2 paper-based recreational reading, most of the low proficiency readers reported that L2 recreational reading was not part of their habits since they found that it was difficult and less prominent in the curricula. School experiences can help increase self-efficacy in reading and in turn prompt learners to visualise future-oriented conceptions of themselves as readers that engage in such activities (Urduan & Pajares, 2006). In contrast, participants reported positive views towards digital recreational reading, which confirms the relevance of digital settings as an essential aspect of learning that is preferred by learners (Mckenna et al., 2012).

Finally, participants reported that teacher encouragement, whether academically or affectively, had a positive impact on how they perceived reading in a second language. Moreover, teacher encouragement and praise were fundamental aspects of reading self-efficacy among participants (Fathi & Soleimani, 2020; Lee & Schallert, 2014). Students also reported that their reading self-efficacy was negatively impacted when they witnessed their peers completing successful tasks. This somewhat contrasts with Bandura's (1997) vicarious experiences in self-efficacy, that is, with the idea that individuals believe they can complete a task once they observe their peers complete that task successfully. These participants felt they were more capable of reading in the L2 when they performed better than their peers, and felt less proficient when their peers outperformed them.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present mixed-methods study was to explore the relationship between L2 reading attitudes, L2 reading self-efficacy, and L2 reading proficiency of Chilean 11th grade EFL students in a blended learning context. It must be noted that the present study had limitations that were related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was carried out in one public high school, which prevented researchers from accessing students in other educational institutions. This would have yielded a more comprehensive view of the attitudes and perceptions of EFL learners in a blended learn-

ing context. Furthermore, due to the nature of the pandemic context, researchers were unable to administer an experimental treatment that could assess actual gains in reading attitudes, self-efficacy, or reading proficiency.

The impact upon the perceptions of learners of the learning environment and the type of instruction is a relevant aspect to be discussed from a pedagogical perspective in blended learning settings. It is essential for teachers to guide their students in the development of L2 reading self-efficacy by means of effective and consistent reading activities with increasing challenge, including synchronous and asynchronous learning. Findings revealed that most participants preferred to complete reading tasks in a recreational digital setting rather than an academic digital one. In other words, students held more positive views towards reading in a remote setting when it was for fun rather than for academic goals. Teachers should incorporate academic reading activities that are more engaging and contextualised to students' age, preferences, and realities to effectively use the synchronous and asynchronous time at their disposal in blended settings. Teachers should also be aware of learners who struggle with extensive reading tasks and focus on increasing their motivation. Emotional and motivational support can improve learners' perceptions of what they can do with reading tasks in different modalities and for different purposes. Educators who recognise the impact of reading attitudes on reading behaviours and reading proficiency are likely to adopt more flexible approaches when encouraging their students to read in blended learning settings.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Marco Cancino:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

**Nicol Gonzalez:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft.

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## APENDIX A

### SPANISH AND ENGLISH VERSION OF ADAPTED SURVEY OF ADOLESCENT READING ATTITUDES (SARA; McKenna et al. (2012).

1. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer para el colegio noticias online en inglés?  
*1. How do you feel about reading news online for class?*
2. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un libro en inglés en tu tiempo libre?  
*2. How do you feel about reading a book in your free time?*
3. ¿Cómo te sentirías al hacer tareas para el colegio usando enciclopedias u otros libros impresos en inglés?  
*3. How do you feel about doing research using encyclopedias (or other books) for a class?*
4. ¿Cómo te sentirías al chatear o enviar e-mails en inglés en tu tiempo libre?  
*4. How do you feel about texting or e-mailing friends in your free time?*
5. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer para el colegio textos online (por ejemplo en el computador) en inglés?  
*5. How do you feel about reading online for a class?*
6. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer textos en tu libro de inglés (texto de la clase de inglés)?  
*6. How do you feel about reading from textbook for your EFL class?*
7. ¿Cómo te sentirías al hablar con un amigo/a sobre algo que has leído en inglés en tu tiempo libre?  
*7. How do you feel about talking with friends about something you've been reading in your free time?*
8. ¿Cómo te sentirías si te regalan un libro o revista en inglés?  
*8. How do you feel about getting a book or a magazine for a present?*
9. ¿Cómo te sentirías al chatear en inglés con tus amigos en tu tiempo libre?  
*9. How do you feel about texting friends in English in your free time?*
10. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer por diversión un libro en inglés un día domingo lluvioso?  
*10. How do you feel about reading a book for fun on a rainy Sunday?*
11. ¿Cómo te sentirías al tener que hacer un proyecto/trabajo en inglés online con tus compañeros de clase?  
*11. How do you feel about working on an Internet project in English with classmates?*
12. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer una novela en inglés para el colegio?  
*12. How do you feel about reading a novel in English for class?*
13. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un libro en inglés online (por ejemplo, en el computador) para el colegio?  
*13. How do you feel about reading a book in English online for a class?*
14. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer cualquier cosa impresa (libros, revistas, comics, etc.) en inglés en tu tiempo libre?  
*14. How do you feel about reading anything printed (books, magazines, comic books, etc.) in English in your free time?*
15. ¿Cómo te sentirías al usar un diccionario en las clases de inglés?  
*15. How do you feel about using a dictionary for the English class?*
16. ¿Cómo te sentirías al tener que buscar información en inglés online (por ejemplo, en el computador) para una clase?  
*16. How do you feel about looking up information online for a class?*
17. ¿Cómo te sentirías al leer un diario o revista en inglés para el colegio?  
*17. How do you feel about reading a newspaper or amagazine for a class?*
18. ¿Cómo te sentirías al usar redes sociales en inglés en tu tiempo libre?  
*18. How do you feel about being on social media websites in your free time?*

## APPENDIX B

### SPANISH AND ENGLISH VERSION OF ADAPTED READING COMPONENT OF QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH SELF-EFFICACY (QESE: Wang et al., 2014).

1. ¿Eres capaz de hacer una tarea por ti mismo (solo) cuando incluye lectura de textos en inglés?  
*1. Can you do homework alone when they include English texts?*
2. Cuando lees en inglés, ¿eres capaz de adivinar el significado de palabras que no conoces?  
*2. When you read English articles, can you guess the meaning of unknown words?*
3. ¿Eres capaz de entender noticias online escritas en inglés?  
*3. Can you understand the English news on the Internet?*
4. ¿Eres capaz de leer y entender narraciones cortas en inglés?  
*4. Can you read short English narratives?*
5. ¿Eres capaz de leer diarios en inglés?  
*5. Can you read English newspapers?*
6. ¿Eres capaz de descubrir el significado de nuevas palabras usando un diccionario inglés-inglés?  
*6. Can you find out the meaning of new words by using English-English dictionaries?*
7. ¿Eres capaz de entender artículos sobre la cultura chilena escritos en inglés?  
*7. Can you understand articles in English about Chilean culture?*
8. ¿Eres capaz de entender material nuevo, escrito en inglés (por ejemplo, noticias auténticas de revistas), seleccionado por tu profesor de la asignatura?  
*8. Can you understand new reading materials (e.g news from the Times magazine) selected by your English instructor?*