

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES CREATING TEACHING MATERIALS AS A TOOL FOR TEACHERS' LITERATURE TRAINING

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Abstract

Help students develop into future teachers who are prepared to take learners' needs into account. Provide innovative teaching and learning resources as part of the professional development requirements for student teachers. The scarcity of reading materials is one of the biggest issues in many rural and township communities. It is challenging for teachers to establish a productive learning atmosphere when this is the case. Every learner should have access to all the books and resources necessary to spark their interest in reading. In cases where reading resources are scarce, teachers ought to produce as many of them as they can. Therefore, to educate teachers for their future jobs, instructional material design is essential. The purpose of this study was to evaluate teachers' proficiency in creating resources. Fifty B.Ed. Foundation Phase II second-year students from Central University of Technology's Department of Educational and Professional Studies in South Africa participated in this research. "Participants were purposively selected, and their performance as student teachers was assessed using a marking rubric and structured classroom observations. To create their own Big Book, students were told to see videos on YouTube that demonstrated the process. The creative idea generation from the YouTube technique was explained to students, showing them how to use it and enhance students' creativity for their idea generation. The results of the study demonstrated that using YouTube video technique helped students generate creative ideas to design a big book for future use. This means that instead of depending on the Department of Education's reading materials, student teachers should be encouraged to create their own to promote and improve future teaching-learning outcomes and make learning more engaging and pleasurable for learners. To prepare students for the workforce, the new study suggests that higher education institutions' instructors should foster a culture that encourages critical thinking, greater research, and creative thinking. The suggestion is to include opportunities for creativity in the lessons one teaches: To create their own Big Book, students were told to see videos on YouTube that demonstrated the process. The first step in this research was creating a marking rubric for each student to assess their level of creativity. The researcher in this study employed a statistical strategy to analyze quantitative data. It was discovered that most students could create books and other educational materials; some of them had trouble finishing large books for a variety of reasons. This means that instead of depending on the Department of Education's reading materials, student teachers should be encouraged to create their own to promote and improve future teaching-learning outcomes and make learning more engaging and pleasurable for learners. To prepare students for the workforce, the new study implies that higher education institutions' instructors should foster a culture that encourages critical thinking, greater research, and creative thinking. The suggestion is to include opportunities for creativity in the lessons one teaches.

Keywords: *Big Book, experiences, foundation phase students, student teachers, teaching materials.*

1. Introduction

South African rural and township primary schools continue to face challenges due to a lack of engaging and reading-level-appropriate materials to support young learners' literacy development. The scarcity of appropriate resources creates a significant obstacle for teachers striving to cultivate effective learning environments and to meet the diverse needs of their learners. Consequently, fostering reading proficiency within primary education remains a critical issue. Teachers play a central role in promoting early literacy by implementing effective pedagogical strategies and using relevant instructional resources. The use of suitable and engaging materials is essential for enhancing students' reading abilities and establishing a culture of reading (Rohani, 2020; Nurrita, 2018). When such resources are limited or unavailable, teachers must rely on their own creativity and expertise to design and produce appropriate teaching materials.

In the twenty-first century, technology has become an important tool in teacher education and professional development. Students in higher education are expected to develop competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and creativity. Integrating technology into the curriculum supports these competencies by providing access to multimedia resources, including videos, simulations, and interactive activities, which enhance engagement and learning (Pink, 2018). Online platforms also allow students to learn at their own pace and explore new knowledge and practical skills (Pink, 2018).

Student-centered learning is closely linked to these technological developments. This approach emphasizes active participation, engagement, and learner autonomy, shifting away from traditional teacher-centered methods (Dayagbil et al., 2021). Technology further supports student-centered learning by enabling flexible and personalized learning experiences, allowing learning to occur anytime and anywhere (Maitra, 2007; Francé, 2014; Lai et al., 2018). Despite these advancements, traditional teaching methods are still widely used and may not adequately prepare learners with the skills required in a rapidly changing and interconnected world. Innovative approaches that foster critical thinking, self-directed learning, and reflective practice are therefore needed (Almazroa & Alotaibi, 2023).

This study examines teachers' experiences in developing their own instructional materials, particularly Big Books, as a means for literacy instruction and professional development. By involving student teachers in creating instructional materials, the study aims to enhance creativity, teaching skills, and readiness for future classroom situations. The primary objective is to investigate teachers' experiences in designing instructional materials for literature education and to assess how this process contributes to their professional growth and ability to support students' reading skills.

2. Literature review

2.1. Big Books as instructional materials in early literacy

Big Books are widely recognized as effective tools for supporting early literacy development. These oversized storybooks typically include large print, short sentences, and colorful illustrations, making them ideal for shared reading in classrooms (Rofiaha et al., 2021; Megawati & Wulandari, 2017). Their size ensures that all learners can clearly see both text and images, which is particularly useful for group reading activities (Mahayanti et al., 2017). Features such as large fonts, vivid illustrations, and simple or predictable storylines help learners connect visual cues with the meaning of the text (Khasana & Wibawa, 2019). These elements not only support comprehension but also encourage greater participation during reading. The combination of visual and textual features can also enhance vocabulary development for early learners.

Big Books are especially suitable for beginner readers because they use simple language structures and short sentences aligned with developmental levels (Madyawati, 2016). Large print and supportive illustrations help learners follow text more easily and build confidence in reading. Some studies suggest that Big Books may even be more effective than standard-sized books for vocabulary acquisition, as all learners can engage with the same text simultaneously (Kusuma Dayu & Setyaningsih, 2022). Although originally designed for early childhood education, their use has extended into the early primary grades, where visual support and interactive features can foster positive attitudes toward reading (Prawiyogi et al., 2021; Tatminingsih, 2022). However, their effectiveness depends on the context in which they are used.

2.2. Teacher-created materials and resource constraints

Big Books are particularly valuable in contexts with limited access to age-appropriate reading materials. In many developing education systems, including rural and township schools, shortages of engaging books remain a barrier to improving literacy outcomes. Surveys such as the Innovation for Indonesia's School Children (INOVASI, 2017–2018) highlight this challenge.

Figure 1. Illustrative examples of Big Books produced by student teachers demonstrating design and content features.



In response, teacher-created instructional materials have gained importance. Collaborative efforts among teachers, local governments, and organizations have facilitated the development and distribution of Big Books in underserved regions, such as East Nusa Tenggara and Sumba Island. These initiatives not only provide learners with access to reading resources but also empower teachers to create contextually

relevant materials. Designing their own instructional resources allows teachers to tailor content to learners' linguistic, cultural, and educational needs while fostering creativity, innovation, and professional growth.

2.3. Technology integration and student-centred learning

Technology integration has further expanded opportunities for developing instructional materials like Big Books. Modern teaching approaches emphasize student-centered environments where learners actively engage with the content rather than passively receiving information (Lai, Hsiao, & Hsieh, 2018). Digital platforms, including video-sharing tools and online resources, support student teachers in creating teaching materials. Instructional videos, for example, can guide learners through Big Book development, providing practical skills in material design (Bragg et al., 2021).

Technology also supports flexible, personalized learning, allowing student teachers to learn at their own pace and explore innovative strategies (Ross, 2011). The combination of hands-on creation and technology fosters an interactive learning environment, which is critical for preparing teachers for contemporary classrooms. Although Big Books and teacher-created materials are known to support early literacy, limited research has explored student teachers' experiences in creating these resources during their professional training. Similarly, technology's role in facilitating practical teaching material development warrants further exploration. This study addresses these gaps by examining how student teachers engage in Big Book creation and how this hands-on process contributes to their professional growth.

3. Research design

This study employed a quantitative research design using statistical methods to analyse student teachers' competencies in developing materials and arranging classroom environments. This design allowed for objective assessment of performance and skills, providing clear insights into the effectiveness of practical, hands-on training.

4. Objectives of the study

The primary objective was to assess the proportion of student teachers who could design and produce Big Books effectively to enhance learners' reading skills.

Additional objectives included:

- Assessing student teachers' creativity in developing teaching materials.
- Evaluating competencies in classroom environment layout.
- Determining overall performance using a structured marking rubric.

5. Methods

5.1. Participants

A total Fifty (n=50) second-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Foundation Phase student teachers from the Department of Educational and Professional Studies at the Central University of Technology, South Africa, participated in the study. Specifically, 30 female and 20 male participants were purposively selected, reflecting the gender distribution of the program, with twenty male and thirty female students.

5.2. Data collection and procedure

Data were collected through classroom observations and a structured marking rubric to evaluate Big Book projects. Students worked in groups to design and produce their Big Books. A YouTube video demonstrating the creation process was provided, and rubrics were shared in advance to clarify assessment criteria, including creativity and design quality.

Students were briefed on the study's purpose and task requirements. They watched instructional videos and applied their learning to develop Big Books. All performances were treated confidentially to maintain a supportive learning environment.

5.3. Data analysis

Quantitative analysis was used to evaluate student teachers' competencies. The percentages determined performance levels in material development and classroom environment layout.

6. Results and analysis of students' performance based on the scoring rubric

Regarding Table 1, fifty participants created design big books and submitted them together with their evaluation rubrics. Participants' characteristics are shown in Table 1. For this study, thirty (n=30) female and twenty (n=20) male student teachers participated, as women make up the majority of the program's foundation phase, with fifty students in all (n=50). Thirty (0.6%) of the participants were female, while the fewest (20 (0.4%)) were male.

Table 1. Sample distribution according to gender.

Gender	Number	Percent %
Male	20	0,4
Female	30	0,6
Total	50	100

Table 2 shows students' performance on the question in terms of 1-10 items. This includes results of percentage.

Table 2. Students' Performance Based on the Scoring Rubric.

No	Assessment Criteria	Rating (1–5)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	Is the cover both eye-catching and educational??	4	9	18%
2	Are the font size and type used suitable for the students?	4	7	14%
3	Are the sentences brief for the students' level?	5	7	14%
4	Is the reading level age appropriate?	5	6	12%
5	Will students find the text engaging enough to read?	5	4	8%
6	Are the topics and activities sufficiently covered?	4	2	4%
7	Are the subjects engaging and inspiring for students?	4	5	10%
8	Do the subjects encourage students to voice their own opinions?	4	2	4%
9	Is the design and arrangement suitable and understandable?	5	4	8%
10	Are the subjects realistic?	5	4	8%
	Total			

Results of Participants Based on the Scoring Rubric

The results from the scoring rubric highlight several important patterns in how student teachers performed when developing their Big Books. Overall, it is evident that participants were more confident in the technical and structural aspects of material development than in creating engaging, learner-centred content.

In terms of visual appeal, 9 students (18%) received a Level 4 rating for designing covers that were both eye-catching and educational. This suggests that many participants were able to apply basic design principles effectively to capture learners' attention. Similarly, 7 students (14%) showed competence in selecting appropriate font size and type, which plays a key role in supporting readability for young learners.

Looking at language use, 7 students (14%) achieved the highest rating (Level 5) for writing sentences that were brief and suitable for the learners' level. In addition, 6 students (12%) ensured that the reading level of their texts matched the age of the intended learners. These findings indicate that most participants have a good grasp of foundational literacy principles, particularly in adapting content to suit learners' developmental needs.

However, the results also show weaker performance in areas related to learner engagement and critical thinking. Only 4 students (8%) created texts that were engaging enough to capture learners' interest, while 5 students (10%) developed topics that could be considered inspiring. More notably, only 2 students (4%) designed activities that were sufficiently developed or that encouraged learners to express their own opinions. This points to a limited ability to move beyond basic content creation towards more interactive and learner-centred approaches.

In addition, only 4 students (8%) achieved the highest rating for the overall design and organisation of their Big Books, as well as for ensuring that the content was realistic. These elements are important because well-structured and relatable materials can significantly enhance learners' understanding and connection to the content.

Taken together, the findings reveal a clear trend. While student teachers are generally capable in areas such as design, readability, and age-appropriate writing, they experience challenges when it comes to incorporating engagement, interactivity, and opportunities for critical thinking. This suggests a need for teacher education programmes to place greater emphasis on developing creativity and supporting student teachers in designing more learner-centred materials.

7. Discussion

The findings highlight the value of practical, hands-on experience in teacher education. Creating Big Books allowed student teachers to apply theoretical knowledge while engaging creatively. Many students demonstrated increased confidence in designing materials, experimenting with illustrations, and arranging content to engage learners effectively.

Digital tools, such as YouTube instructional videos, enhanced learning by offering step-by-step guidance and allowing self-paced exploration. The combination of hands-on creation and digital support provided a safe space for experimentation, enabling students to refine their skills without fear of failure.

Overall, producing Big Books bridged theory and practice. Students developed practical teaching skills, reflected on their competencies, and gained a deeper understanding of how well-designed materials can foster literacy development. The process also encouraged creativity, problem-solving, and reflective practice, all critical for future classroom success.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this research show that guided material development is a powerful approach to strengthen student teachers' professional skills. Creating Big Books helped participants develop creativity, critical thinking, and practical teaching abilities, while increasing confidence in supporting learners' reading development.

The findings suggest that teacher education programs should integrate hands-on material creation into their curricula, allowing student teachers to connect theory with practice. Digital resources and instructional videos should also be incorporated to provide flexible, step-by-step guidance. Additionally, schools and training institutions should support teacher-led creation of instructional materials, particularly in resource-limited contexts, to ensure culturally and developmentally relevant materials are available.

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