



Utilizing Dimensions of Critical Literacy to Improve Active Learning in Teaching English Novels in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

English is the language of learning and teaching in many countries, as in Lesotho. This language has a curriculum, and one of its components includes reading English novels. Although English is accorded this prestigious status in Lesotho secondary schools, minimal effort has been made to address the improvement of learners' reading skills of English novels. With this in mind, this theoretical paper focused on teachers' use of Critical Literacy (CL) by highlighting some literature perspectives on traditional banking education and CL, the emerging relationship between CL and Active Learning (AL), and the dimensions of CL as enhancers. The methodology used in this article is derived from the experiences of the authors and three English teachers in Lesotho schools related to the dimensions of CL in the teaching of English novels (EN). The study concluded that CL should be re-visited and recognized to enable teachers to act as the driving force in teaching EN.

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INTRODUCTION

English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Lesotho and is also a compulsory subject that remains a 'pass' prerequisite.¹ One of the components of the English curriculum at the Junior Certificate level is English Literature, which includes reading English novels,² and the approach to teaching in all subjects should be learner-centred.³ Teachers must use active learning (AL) and consider skills that would be most practical in the future to prepare learners for tertiary studies and the world of work.⁴ According to Popovoska and Kuzmanovoska, until now, teaching approaches that emphasize cooperation and effective learning have been inadequate or insufficiently implemented. Minimal effort has been made to improve learners' reading skills in English novels (EN).⁵ AL is a unifying term to generate awareness and collaboration among those interested in improving their teaching.⁶ In simple terms, AL means that learners assume greater responsibility for their

¹ Mohaeka Raselimo and Mahao Mahao, "The Lesotho curriculum and assessment policy: Opportunities and threats," *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 1 (2015); Maseqao Regina Mabejane, "Science teacher training within the education system in Lesotho and the realities on the ground," *Educational Journal of the University of Patras* 2, no. 2 (2015); Arone C. Koloti and Thuthukile Jita, "Grade R teachers' experiences with the implementation of the mother-tongue-instruction policy for pre-reading skills in Lesotho," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 11, no. 1 (2021).

² Ministry of Education and Training, 2012. Junior Secondary Syllabus-English. Maseru, Lesotho, 2012.

³ Mamonaheng Amelia Matsau, "Investigating the learner-centred approach in language teaching in Lesotho" (Ph.D., Victoria University, 2007).

⁴ Mina Tsay and Miranda Brady, "A case study of cooperative learning and communication pedagogy: Does working in teams make a difference?" *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (2010).

⁵ Nalevska Gorica Popovska and Marina Kuzmanovska, "Teaching methods as a factor of students' learning motivation," *Education* 2, no. 3-4 (2020).

⁶ Emily P. Driessen, et al. "Demystifying the meaning of active learning in postsecondary biology education," *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 19, no. 4 (2020).

learning and the mastery of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.⁷ This shift towards AL equally targets making teaching more innovative and interactive.⁸ Thus, AL enhances teaching methods and improves learners' thinking processes. The teacher provides opportunities for learners to go beyond what is written and explore what is meant, thus targeting learners' independent thinking and analysis skills.⁹

Previous studies on AL, particularly on the learner's role, have proved inconclusive; this is probably because the proposed strategies focused on other stakeholders, such as policymakers, senior officials of the Ministry of Education and those involved in teacher education planning, to the exclusion of teachers, yet the latter plays a significant role in learning.¹⁰ The teaching of EN is usually characterized by learner passivity and a reliance on the teacher reading aloud and then giving their interpretation of the novel. This method disregards learners' interpretation of the novel and disempowers learners.¹¹ Another challenge is to sustain learners' interest, especially in overcrowded classes in Lesotho secondary schools. Klarer argues that the novel's generally long and complex narration poses a challenge to the impression of unity since the novel cannot be read all in one sitting, unlike a short story.¹² Teaching reading skills can help learners form connections in their set-work novels. Hence, it can be concluded that using English novels can be an alternative way to improve their reading skills in the English learning process.¹³ The literature shows that different countries have attempted to address some of the challenges AL poses in teaching EN. For example, in Kenya, attendance of teachers at in-service training seems to be effective for English and Literature teachers.¹⁴ In a study in Uganda, teachers with large classes reported that group work is an essential strategy in AL.¹⁵ It can be assumed that Lesotho may benefit from the above strategy.

Considering the above-identified challenges, this article aims to highlight the emerging relationship between CL and AL in teaching EN, briefly discuss some literature perspectives on traditional banking education and CL, and consider the dimensions of CL as enhancers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emerging Relationship Between Critical Literacy and Active Learning

According to Abdul Aziz and Yeng, "Critical literacy recognizes the world we live in as texts imbued with power dynamics which determines our values and positions in society and deserves to be examined, contested and reconstructed so we may create a more just and equal."¹⁶ It focuses on power and promotes reflection, transformation and action. It encourages readers to actively participate in the reading process, question, dispute, and examine relations. On the other hand, active learning engages learners in learning through activities or discussions in class, emphasizing higher-order thinking and often involving group work.¹⁷ It could be argued from the earlier explanation that critical literacy and active learning involve learners constructing their

⁷ Mary Tedesco-Schneck, "Active learning as a path to critical thinking: Are competencies a roadblock?" *Nurse Education in Practice* 13, no. 1 (2013); Brenda L. Gleason, Michael J. Peeters, Beth H. Resman-Targoff, Samantha Karr, Sarah McBane, Kristi Kelley, Tyan Thomas, and Tina H. Denetclaw, "An active-learning strategies primer for achieving ability-based educational outcomes," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 75, no. 9 (2011); Michelene Chi, "Active-constructive-interactive: A conceptual framework for differentiating learning activities," *Topics in Cognitive Science* 1, no. 1 (2009); Bradford S. Bell and Steve WJ Kozlowski, "Active learning: Effects of core training design elements on self-regulatory processes, learning, and adaptability," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93, no. 2 (2008): 296; Minh Nhat Vinh Phan, "EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of Active Learning in Reading Classroom," *International Journal of Language Instruction* 1, no. 1 (2022).

⁸ Kheladi, Mohammed, "Teachers' perceptions and concerns about implementing active learning in teaching EFL literature. A case study at Tlemcen University, Algeria," *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* 11, no. 3 (2021).

⁹ Mustafa Erdem, "The role of teachers in teaching literature," *Thesis* 3 (2015); Murat Hişmanoğlu, "Teaching English through literature," *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005).

¹⁰ Frances Vavrus, Matthew Thomas, and Lesley Bartlett. *Ensuring quality by attending to inquiry: Learner-centered pedagogy in sub-Saharan Africa* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO-IICBA, 2011); UNESCO, *World Data on Education* (7th ed) (Maseru, Lesotho, 2010).

¹¹ Brian Parkinson and Helen Reid Thomas, *Teaching literature in a second language* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

¹² Mario Klarer, *An introduction to literary studies* (Routledge, 2013).

¹³ Oktaviari Ayu Sasalia and Fatimah Mulya Sari, "Utilizing novel in the reading class to explore students' viewpoint of its effectiveness," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning* 1, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁴ Mercy Wanja Njagi, Colomba Kaburi Muriungi, and Christine Atieno Peter, "Effectiveness of professional development on English and literature teachers in selected schools in Tharaka-Nithi and Meru County, Kenya," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 4, no. 8 (2014).

¹⁵ Ronesh Rajcoomar, "Strategies for promoting active learning in large underfunded Physics classrooms in Kerala, India" (Ph.D., University of South Africa, 2013).

¹⁶ Azlina Abdul Aziz and Grace Chang Siew Yeng, *Hysterical Daydreaming: Personal Narrative of Malaysian Youths' Schooling Experiences* (Penerbit UKM, 2022), 18.

¹⁷ Cynthia Brame, "Active learning," *Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching*, 2016, accessed May 25, 2023; Junaida Ismail, Etty Harniza Harun, Aishah Musa, Samsiah Bidin, Muna Abd Jalil, and Meriam Ali, "Active learning: review among Faculty of Business and Management students," *Journal of Administrative Science* 18, no. 1 (2021): 278-285.

knowledge and understanding of English novels through engaging in activities that require higher-order thinking, thus demanding essential thinking.

Moreover, critical literacy and active learning make classrooms inclusive by inviting learners' participation. In the opinion of the authors, the use of banking education in the teaching of English novels could imply passive reading rather than active reading. Passive reading involves silent reading and superficial comprehension questions.¹⁸ On the contrary, active reading includes reading beyond simple meaning; working in groups; reading between the lines; and working on thought-provoking questions. Furthermore, G'ayratovna posits that active reading occurs when students are proactively involved in reading a text.¹⁹ It can therefore be argued that critical literacy and active reading share similar characteristics. The advantages of active reading are summarised as follows: it helps learners to contextualize reading; provides a framework for approaching the text; enables learners to be analytic; interacts with the text, and interacts with other learners to discuss possible perspectives.²⁰ It can be concluded that active reading is critical literacy. The problem in this study is that teaching and learning English novels in Lesotho may present the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge, which does not encourage learners' critical literacy; thus, learners cannot demonstrate a more profound understanding of the English novel. It, therefore, becomes essential to interrogate how the dimensions of critical literacy may be utilized to improve the teaching of English novels.

Pondering Critical Literacy and Traditional Banking Education

The roots of critical literacy may be traced to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who studied literacy from a socio-political aspect by linking power with literacy.²¹ In the mid-twentieth century, Freire was Brazil's Pernambuco Department of Education and Culture director. In this position, he designed an adult literacy campaign in the 1960s that utilized critical pedagogy. His literacy design was based on the critical social theory that emphasized a critical pedagogy, putting schooling in a political context. He challenged teachers and researchers to uncover implicit oppression within inequities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity.²² Freire's programme was based on a model where learner creativity was appreciated and the idea of learner empowerment.

In traditional banking education, the teacher becomes the automatic distributor of knowledge, and the learner is the passive recipient.²³ Therefore, this contributes to perpetuating existing structures of oppression and the asymmetrical relations of power.²⁴ Traditional banking education reduces any sense of relationship that the learner may have with the material to be learned and stifles students' creativity and critical thinking.²⁵ Mayo further states that it is characterized by the learner's isolation from the content of their education.²⁶ This banking model considers learners as uncritically exposed to ideas and their lives deemed irrelevant. Therefore, Teachers are seen as pillars of knowledge, while learners are receivers of knowledge that they memorize and repeat without relating it to their lives.²⁷

¹⁸ Miok Jeong, "Developing critical literacy through English newspaper articles for high-intermediate EFL students in Korea" (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-River Falls, 2012).

¹⁹ Djabbarova Dilfuza G'ayratovna, "Reading Skills Through Active Reading Techniques," *Texas Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 5 (2022)

²⁰ Leda Maria Braga Tomitch, "Designing reading tasks to foster critical thinking," *Ilha do Desterro: A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies* 38 (2000).

²¹ Maxine Dyer, "Critical literacy: Promoting equity in early childhood settings," *He Kupu the Word* 6, no. 3 (2020); Margarita Felipe Fajardo, "A review of critical literacy beliefs and practices of English language learners and teachers," *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL* 10 (2015); Katrina Willard Hall, "A critical analysis of the books read aloud by kindergarten teachers and their reasons for book selection" (Ph.D., University of Florida, 2004); Aimee L. Papola, "Critical literacy, Common Core, and "close reading," *Colorado Reading Journal* 24 (2013).

²² Jackie Marsh and Joanne Larson, "Making literacy real: Theories and practices for learning and teaching," *Making Literacy Real* (2014).

²³ Sandra Lucia Osorio, "Promoting critical literacy among emergent bilinguals: An exploration of their identities" (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013); Cardinal Ihejirika, "A Constructivist Appraisal of Paulo Freire's Critique of Banking System of Education," *European Journal of Educational and Development Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2017); Daniel Aseer Kwaghande, "The epistemological implication of the banking model of education and the need for problem-based model of learning in educational system," *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)* 4, no. 5 (2020).

²⁴ Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the oppressed (MB Ramos, Trans.) (New York, Continuum, 1970).

²⁵ Peter Mayo, "Critical literacy and emancipatory politics: The work of Paulo Freire," *International Journal of Educational Development* 15, no. 4 (1995); Bilal Hamamra, Nabil Alawi, and Abdel Karim Daragmeh, "Covid-19 and the decolonisation of education in Palestinian universities," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 14 (2021).

²⁶ Mayo, "Critical literacy and emancipatory politics: The work of Paulo Freire."

²⁷ Mohammad, Aliakbari and Elham Faraji, "Basic principles of critical pedagogy," In 2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR, vol. 17, 78-85, 2011; Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*; Elsadig Ali Elsadig Elnadeef, "Perspective on the Relationship between Banking Education and English Achievement. A Case of Fresh EFL Students at King Khalid University," *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 5, no. 3 (2022).

Critical literacy researchers reject the traditional banking education system. First, it is said to have over-packaged knowledge, easily transferable to passive learners, depicting the world as static and unchangeable.²⁸ Second, it is dehumanizing, as it creates oppressive passivity in learners. Its capability to minimize or annul the learners' creative power and stimulate their credulity serves the oppressors' interests, who care not to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed.²⁹ So teachers must move away from banking education, as it promotes marginalization, maintaining the dominant ideology of education institutions.³⁰ Critical literacy is associated with various concepts, such as critical language awareness, critical thinking, and critical reading.³¹ Critical language awareness focuses on problematizing hidden curricula and grammar and seizing teachable moments by, among other things, analyzing how power relations involving race, class, and gender play out in language.³² It regards the individual reader as an independent critical thinker.³³ Critical thinking can be defined as an individual thought process that begins with the intent to solve a problem or to answer a question by examining different options and choosing the most suitable and logical one.³⁴ Critical reading involves analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating what is read.³⁵ On this note, the role of the teacher is to ask questions and provide the information necessary to promote learners' critical thinking.³⁶ Below is a summary of the characteristics of critical reading, critical thinking and critical literacy provided by Bobkina and Stefanova.³⁷

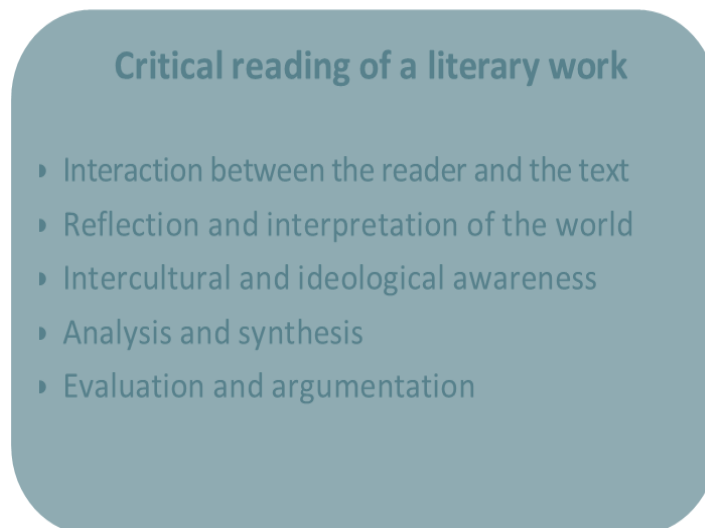


Fig 1: Characteristics of Critical reading

²⁸ Aliakbari and Faraji, *Basic principles of critical pedagogy*.

²⁹ Elnadeef, "Perspective on the Relationship between Banking Education and English Achievement. A Case of Fresh EFL Students at King Khalid University."

³⁰ Rajendra Chetty, "Freirean principles and critical literacy to counter retrograde impulses in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 6, no. 1 (2015).

³¹ Terry Locke and Alison Cleary, "Critical literacy as an approach to literary study in the multicultural, high-school classroom," *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 10, no. 1 (2011); Kristine Brown and Anne Burns, *Developing critical literacy* (National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, 1999); Chetty, "Freirean principles and critical literacy to counter retrograde impulses in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement."; Fajardo, "A review of critical literacy beliefs and practices of English language learners and teacher."

³² Shelley K. Taylor, Collette Despagne, and Farahnaz Faez, "Critical language awareness," In *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching: Teaching Speaking and Pronunciation in TESOL*, ed. Liantas, John I. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

³³ Chetty, "Freirean principles and critical literacy to counter retrograde impulses in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement."

³⁴ Nada J Alsaleh, "Teaching Critical Thinking Skills: Literature Review," *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET* 19, no. 1 (2020).

³⁵ Kadir Abd, Norbadiyah, R. Subki, F. Jamal, and Juhaida Ismail, "The importance of teaching critical reading skills in a Malaysian reading classroom," in *The WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings Bali, Indonesia: WEI 2014*, 208-218. Accessed May 25, 2023. <https://www.westeastinstitute.com/proceedings/2014-bali-presentations/>

³⁶ Paulo Freire, *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985).

³⁷ Jelena Bobkina and Svetlana Stefanova, "Literature and critical literacy pedagogy in the EFL classroom: Towards a model of teaching critical thinking skills," *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 6, no. 4 (2016).

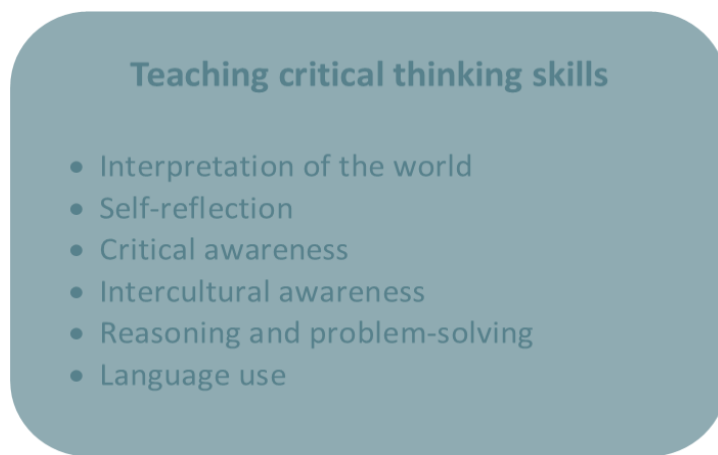


Fig 2: Characteristics of Critical Thinking



Fig 3: Characteristics of Critical Literacy

There are similar characteristics of critical reading, critical thinking and critical literacy. Unlike traditional teaching, critical literacy promotes the active participation of learners. Kaur and Sidhu³⁸ argue that critical literacy can be a credible pedagogy only if it allows learners to understand and unravel the biases and prejudices in a given language. It means making space for discussion, gaining sociocultural knowledge, interpreting dominance, creating comfort with complexity, and taking action when needed. Learners of all ages might need their teachers' words, but they will also need to be able to see and speak out for themselves.³⁹ The critical literacy model is meant to be infused with and used as a lens for learning that is an integral part of daily classroom practices.⁴⁰

Utilizing dimensions of critical literacy to improve the teaching of English novels

From the experiences of the authors and three English teachers in Lesotho schools, four dimensions of critical literacy emerged as enhancers for improving the teaching of English novels.

³⁸ Sarjit Kaur and Gurnam Kaur Sidhu, "Evaluating the critical literacy practices of tertiary students," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 123 (2014).

³⁹ Aimee Hendrix-Soto and Melissa Mosley Wetzel, "A review of critical literacies in preservice teacher education: pedagogies, shifts, and barriers," *Teaching Education* 30, no. 2 (2019).

⁴⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education. 2009. "Capacity building series: Critical literacy (Special Edition no. 9)." Canada: Ontario Ministry of Education. Accessed September 21, 2020. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacy_numeracy/inspire/research/Critical_Literacy.pdf

Disrupting the commonplace as an enhancer

This dimension involves challenging learners to examine the familiar closely through new lenses.⁴¹ It is a way to interrogate texts by asking how texts try to position learners.⁴² At this stage, teachers begin to develop in learners a language of critique and hope, meaning learners must start to look at the text with a critical eye.⁴³ Teachers must help learners avoid taking the text at surface value, thus critiquing it to find its deeper meaning.⁴⁴ Therefore, learners must be encouraged to problematize text issues or others' claims using their experiential and academic knowledge, such as knowledge gained through life experience in social and cultural contexts or learned through classroom instruction or reading.⁴⁵ In disrupting the commonplace, the teachers must change their perceptions of the learners in a more contingent and recursive way.⁴⁶ This dimension may be resisted because it disrupts the status quo, especially when teachers, compared to learners, have the dominant voice in the classroom. This may be challenging for teachers who may have enjoyed being the dominant figure in traditional teaching. CL involves relinquishing power as a knowledgeable authority and adopting a sense of openness and possibility. The authors then find it essential that the teacher releases the power they hold in teaching English novels and allows learners to take charge of their learning by constructing their knowledge instead of the teacher analyzing the novel to the exclusion of learners. Rogers et al. argue that in the process of disrupting and critiquing societal power relationships, critical literacy practices end up valuing "dialogue, debate and dissent," which are essential "features of a democracy".⁴⁷ This means that the active involvement of learners, either through dialogue or debate, can improve the teaching of English novels. Learners can effect multiple analysis perspectives and deepen their understanding of the novel's meaning, disrupting traditional banking education that happens to disempower learners by denying them a voice in their study of English novels, where the teacher takes over the discussion.

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints as an Enhancer

The second dimension is about interrogating texts through multiple voices and perspectives.⁴⁸ Its focus is on understanding experiences and texts from learners' perspectives and the viewpoints of others and considering these various perspectives concurrently.⁴⁹ This requires learners to envision texts and experiences not only through their expertise but also through varying perspectives. There is a continuous interrogation of texts to find the dominant and marginalized voices, together with a need for an awareness of underrepresented voices in texts or experiences. This dimension helps learners understand power and privilege.⁵⁰ It is pertinent in this study as it agrees with what Freire called the "culture circle", where literacy is offered as a tool through empowering groups rather than individuals.⁵¹ In cultural circles, everyone makes progress, not just a few isolated "star learners."⁵² Group work will empower learners to discover multiple text perspectives, resulting in active learning.

Interaction through group work involves negotiating meaning with others through discussion or other means as a social aspect of constructivism. It is supported by the work of Lev Vygotsky, who viewed thinking and learning as contextualized social practices.⁵³ Work on critical literacy originated from constructivism theory (with its roots in philosophy and psychology), which describes how knowledge is constructed in the human being when information comes into contact with existing knowledge developed by experiences.⁵⁴ CL creates a

⁴¹ Mitzi Lewison, Amy Seely Flint, and Katie Van Sluys, "Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices," *Language Arts* 79, no. 5 (2002); Jeanne Gilliam Fain, "'Um, They Weren't Thinking About Their Thinking': Children's Talk About Issues of Oppression," *Multicultural Perspectives* 10, no. 4 (2008).

⁴² George Lee Cheu-jey, "Two plus four dimensions of critical literacy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 52, no. 1 (2020).

⁴³ Christina Marie Ramirez-Nava, "Exploring critical literacy through teachers' professional learning" (Ph.D., Boise State University, 2013).

⁴⁴ Lewison et al., "Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices."

⁴⁵ Jihyun Nam, "Disrupting the commonplace: Critical literacy practices in the ESL reading classroom," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 11, no. 1 (2020).

⁴⁶ Mark D Vagle, "Lessons in contingent, recursive humility," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54, no. 5 (2011).

⁴⁷ Rebecca Rogers, Melissa Mosley, and Mary Ann Kramer, *Designing socially just learning communities: Critical literacy education across the lifespan* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁸ Cecilie Waallann Brown, "Developing multiple perspectives with EFL learners through facilitated dialogue about images," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 19, no. 3 (2022).

⁴⁹ Lewison et al., "Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices."

⁵⁰ Ramirez-Nava, "Exploring critical literacy through teachers' professional learning" (Ph.D., Boise State University, 2013).

⁵¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.

⁵² Emmy J. Rugut and Ahmed A. Osman, "Reflection on Paulo Freire and classroom relevance," *American International Journal of Social Science* 2, no. 2 (2013).

⁵³ Maureen McLaughlin and Glenn L. DeVogd, *Critical literacy: Enhancing students comprehension of text* (New York: Scholastic, 2004).

⁵⁴ Kaur and Sidhu, "Evaluating the critical literacy practices of tertiary students."

learning environment in which the critique of the text is emphasized, and multiple perspectives are encouraged, explored and valued.⁵⁵ So, CL, as a way of being and doing in the world encourages learners to become active meaning-makers.⁵⁶

Through a critical lens, teachers must interrogate and revise long-held beliefs about traditional teaching methods⁵⁷ and ask themselves: What curriculum practices and teaching practices have been privileged? What counts as literacy? Who decides what uses of language are sanctioned? What are the roles available in the classroom for teachers and learners?⁵⁸ These questions can serve as a starting point for teaching meant to enact change. It, therefore, becomes the teacher's responsibility to leave the traditional methods and make way for new and better methods for the students' benefit.⁵⁹ In moving away from the traditional teaching pedagogy, there is the need to "understand the new, constantly changing environments" and to prepare individuals for "transformative engagement with the world."⁶⁰ According to Comber and Nixon, "Schools and individual teachers must own the existing inequalities and find ways to address them in local contexts. This requires a commitment by individuals as well as whole-school support."⁶¹ In personal interrogations, teachers try to identify the inequalities in their teaching of English novels and discover how they can be best addressed.

Focusing on socio-political issues as an enhancer

This dimension of focusing on socio-political issues gives attention to how the socio-political system, power relationships and language are intertwined.⁶² This involves examining and questioning differences globally, in socio-political ranks and systems.

Traditional teaching approaches are generally teacher-directed, where students are taught in a manner conducive to sitting and listening.⁶³ The traditional teaching of literacy considers the teacher and the text as information sources, portraying learners as having no communication power. The author sets the agenda, establishes the significance of the characters, decides the themes and values, and chooses the viewpoint.⁶⁴ Therefore, the traditional teaching of literacy promotes passivity in learners, as the teacher is the only one given the power to communicate, restricting learners, whereas critical literacy empowers learners, allowing them to express their perspectives and act for themselves.⁶⁵ It is clear, therefore, that critical literacy aims to give learners a voice and encourages active learning as learners construct their knowledge, thus promoting democracy.

According to Vasquez, critical literacy is viewed in this way:

*A critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived. It arises from the social and political conditions that unfold in the communities in which we live. As such, it cannot be traditionally taught. In other words, as teachers, we need to incorporate a critical perspective into our everyday lives with our learners in order to find ways to help children understand the social and political issues around them.*⁶⁶

It could be inferred from the above definition of critical literacy that its use in the classroom helps move away from traditional teaching. In using critical literacy as a lens, readers incorporate examining socio-political issues into a close reading of a text. They begin to take notice of socio-economic factors, such as employment, class systems and discrimination in the text.⁶⁷

⁵⁵ Kuo Jun-min, "Critical literacy in the EFL classroom: Evolving multiple perspectives through learning tasks," *Journal of Asia TEFL* 11, no. 4 (2014).

⁵⁶ Vivian Maria Vasquez, Hilary Janks, and Barbara Comber, "Critical literacy as a way of being and doing," *Language Arts* 96, no. 5 (2019).

⁵⁷ Laura M Pietrandrea, "Co-constructing critical literacy in the middle school classroom" (Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 2008).

⁵⁸ Pietrandrea, "Co-constructing critical literacy in the middle school classroom."

⁵⁹ Djamaldinova Shahlo Obloberdiyevna and Khamidova Umida Odilkhonovna, "Teaching languages using modern educational methods," *International Journal of Intellectual Cultural Heritage* 2, no. 3 (2022).

⁶⁰ Gunther Kress, "Thinking about meaning and learning in a world of instability and multiplicity," *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 2, no. 1 (2007).

⁶¹ Barbara Comber and Helen Nixon, "Literacy Education as a Site for Social Justice: What Do or practices do?" in *Making justice our project: Teachers working toward critical whole language practice*, ed. Carole Edelesky (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1999), 337.

⁶² Bogum Yoon, *Critical literacies: Global and multicultural perspectives* (Cham: Springer, 2015).

⁶³ Gurudeo Anand Tularam and Patrick Machisella, "Traditional vs Non-traditional Teaching and Learning Strategies-the case of E-learning!" *International Journal for Mathematics Teaching and Learning* 19, no. 1 (2018).

⁶⁴ McLaughlin and DeVoogd, *Critical literacy: Enhancing students comprehension of text*.

⁶⁵ Lewison et al., "Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices"; Natalie Amgott, "Critical literacy in# Digital Activism: Collaborative choice and action," *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology* 35, no. 5 (2018).

⁶⁶ Vivian Maria Vasquez, *Negotiating critical literacies with young children* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁶⁷ Papola, "Critical literacy, Common Core, and close reading"; Vasquez et al., "Critical literacy as a way of being and doing."

In reading an English novel closely with critical literacy, readers must make inferences to understand the story's setting and theme.⁶⁸ Such readers will be able to answer questions that require deep analytical thinking about the text.

Taking action and promoting social justice as enhancers

According to Abednia and Crookes, "a defining feature of CL is its emphasis on coupling critical reflection with transformative action, or in Freire's terms, praxis."⁶⁹ CL does not necessarily involve taking a negative standpoint; instead, it means looking at an issue or topic from different angles, analyzing it, and hopefully proposing change and improvement methods.⁷⁰ There is often an activist component to critical literacy education, where the teacher facilitates social change. Once learners and teachers engage in critical research and better understand aspects of their school or community, they engage in projects aimed to improve an area that is lacking; the inference is that collective action is vital for transformation. In teaching English novels, for example, learners may produce posters to raise awareness of a particular disease that may have been presented in the novel. According to Pennycook, CL pedagogy is built on the notion of dialogue... "the opening up of a space for the marginalized to speak, write, or read... so that the voicing of their lives may transform both their lives and the social system that excludes them."⁷¹

CL achieves and encourages social justice by engaging in what Freire refers to as "praxis – reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it."⁷² Social justice-oriented action is about confronting material inequality and restoring humanity by transforming capitalism's political and economic system.⁷³ Taking action to promote social justice does not always need someone to become a social activist. Still, a shift in attitude or how one develops from a superficial reading to a critical reading can also be considered taking action.⁷⁴ CL involves looking at how information from the text can be used to promote social justice.⁷⁵ McLaughlin and DeVoogd further point out that action may include consideration of the following: how one's attitude or actions change about the topic; how one will treat others differently as a result of having critically analyzed the topic; what one can do to change a rule, a procedure or an unjust attitude; and how one can support those who are maltreated.⁷⁶ Thus, teachers and learners would have to be engaged in proposing change and brainstorming ways of improving their current situation. This could therefore contribute to enhancing active learning in the teaching of English novels and thus deepen learners' understanding of the genre.

CONCLUSION

Reading skills are vital for success at school and in the world of work; learners are armed with effective reading skills to communicate well in English as it involves a lot of reading. CL seems a promising method of improving active learning in support of using a learner-centred approach.

CL seeks to create a platform for learners to connect and respond to critical thinking through dialogue.⁷⁷ Teachers implementing critical literacy recognize that there must be a shift away from traditional teaching and passive learning, implying that learners in critical literacy classrooms become responsible for their learning, as well as interacting with other learners and the teacher and thus adding to their knowledge in diverse ways.⁷⁸ CL education's heart includes learners' experience with the world; critically-literate learners often understand reality from different perspectives.⁷⁹

The generation and maintenance of efforts to improve teaching and learning require a continuous and more significant role to be played by teachers since they are the ones who help in the implementation of policies and plans. However, learners' contribution to learning cannot go unnoticed and calls for active involvement. This article argues that teachers should create inclusive classrooms to teach English novels, inviting learners to be active participants. CL may greatly benefit stakeholders, such as teachers, who may be released from the

⁶⁸ Papola, "Critical literacy, Common Core, and close reading."

⁶⁹ Arman Abednia and Graham V. Crookes, "Critical literacy as a pedagogical goal in English language teaching," in *Second Handbook of English Language Teaching*, ed. Gao Xuesong (Cham, Springer, 2019), 19.

⁷⁰ Vasquez, *Negotiating critical literacies with young children*.

⁷¹ Alastair Pennycook, *Critical applied linguistics: A critical re-introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 101.

⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 85.

⁷³ Yuya Takeda, "Praxis of critical literacy: Pragmatic utilization of theoretical tensions," *Critical Education* 13, no. 1 (2022).

⁷⁴ Gin Gin Gustine, "A survey on critical literacy as a pedagogical approach to teaching English in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 7, no. 3 (2018).

⁷⁵ McLaughlin and DeVoogd, *Critical literacy: Enhancing students comprehension of text*.

⁷⁶ McLaughlin and DeVoogd, *Critical literacy: Enhancing students comprehension of text*.

⁷⁷ Jun-min, "Critical literacy in the EFL classroom: Evolving multiple perspectives through learning tasks."

⁷⁸ Lewison et al., "Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices."

⁷⁹ Gustine, "A survey on critical literacy as a pedagogical approach to teaching English in Indonesia."

burden of simply being knowledge depositors. Ultimately, the world of work will benefit by being provided with critical thinkers who may positively contribute to building a democratic nation.

Although CL still has challenges, the article nevertheless argues that it must be incorporated into teaching English novels. This study concludes that CL should be revisited and recognized to enable teachers to act as facilitators in teaching English novels, thus allowing the learners to take charge of their learning. This literature study could help teachers to reflect on their teaching of English novels and to discover how they could utilize CL to improve active learning. Teachers will be better positioned to select and implement teaching strategies that promote practical reading skills of English novels. Learners will be able to read an English novel at a deeper level and will be able to critically analyze it, which is vital in the study of English at the tertiary level and the world of work. Furthermore, teachers can better support learners in their development of questioning, challenging and evaluating English novels, leading to effective reading and writing skills, thus improving the general performance of the subject of English.

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