

## English Teachers' Perspectives and Understandings Towards Critical Literacy Practice in EFL Context

Nur Ijabah<sup>1</sup>, Asdar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [nur.ijabah@trunojoyo.ac.id](mailto:nur.ijabah@trunojoyo.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

*The ideology and socio-political viewpoints of writers significantly shape text and language products. Hence, students engaging in literacy tasks, such as reading and writing, should approach them with a critical mindset, considering various perspectives rather than accepting information uncritically. Critical literacy pedagogy addresses these requirements, aiming to cultivate critical literacy skills in students with the guidance of teachers, who themselves must possess critical thinking abilities and literacy. This study explores English teachers' perceptions and grasp of critical literacy pedagogy. Sixty teachers participated, responding to questionnaires comprising both closed and open-ended questions, alongside brief interviews. The data obtained, quantitative and qualitative, were analyzed through mathematical computations and coding techniques respectively, revealing teachers' positive attitudes toward critical literacy pedagogy. However, this enthusiasm wasn't consistently reflected in its implementation due to cultural beliefs and insufficient teacher knowledge. Consequently, the study recommends professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding and proficiency in incorporating critical literacy pedagogy, particularly within EFL contexts.*

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### 1. Introduction

Texts and literary works are inherently imbued with their writers' ideologies and socio-political perspectives, rendering them non-neutral entities (Wadeet al., 2019). It is incumbent upon readers to deconstruct these embedded ideologies and perspectives, allowing them to form their own opinions regarding whether to accept or resist the information conveyed in the text. Language, discourse, and other literary forms are intimately intertwined with power dynamics, rendering language users unwitting subjects to its influence (Gardner; 2018, Hidayat ;2020). This susceptibility often stems from a tendency to accept information presented in texts unquestioningly. Language can shape thought processes and behavioral patterns, as evidenced by the myriad motivators in persuasive speech. Novianti et al., (2020) note that language embodies social and political dominance positions, underscoring its potential to effectuate personal and societal transformations. On a personal level, language can mold individual character traits, while on a societal level, it plays a pivotal role in shaping the fabric of communities (Shor, 1999). Put differently, language serves as a tool for constructing virtuous and detrimental personal and societal identities. Furthermore, it can be utilized to either vilify or humanize individuals and communities.

Moreover, contemporary trends indicate a shift in the nature of literacy from traditional to digital realms (Baker, 2001). Literacy practices now encompass not only written words but also a diverse array of multi-modal and multi-semiotic texts. Machin-Mastromatteo, (2021) highlights the emergence of multiple literacies in the digital age, expanding beyond textual content to include art, music, movement, visual arts, and other forms of expression. Consequently, deciphering textual codes has become increasingly complex, as digital literacy extends beyond mere textual comprehension. Additionally, digital literacy facilitates the rapid dissemination of information, often beyond control, potentially including misinformation and rumors. This transition from traditional to digital literacy necessitates a rapid evolution in how individuals approach literacy. Seaboyer, J., & Barnett, T. (2019) argues that in this globalized era, engaging with critically literate texts embedded within specific historical, social, and political contexts is imperative especially for digital native generation. Recognizing the potency of language, the construction of texts, and the

imperative of digital literacy, it becomes crucial for language education to adopt teaching methodologies that foster students' critical engagement with language and discourse.

The emergence of language as a means to foster societal improvement has given rise to the concept of critical literacy pedagogy. While critical literacy has its roots in social research dating back to the mid-1930s in Frankfurt, Germany (Freire, P. ; 2020), it gained traction in pedagogical circles during the 1970s with the seminal work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) in his renowned book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." This influential text delineates critical literacy practices within classrooms and underscores the significance of critical literacy in raising students' awareness to combat inequality. Critical literacy entails more than just basic comprehension of texts; it involves insightful interpretations that scrutinize power dynamics and literacy (Gardner, 2018; Wardani 2021; Gustine 2019; Wadeet al., 2019). The goal of critical literacy pedagogy is to address global phenomena of inequity and social injustice that persist unresolved (Blaisdell, 2023; Shor, 1999). Echoing this sentiment, Machin-Mastromatteo, (2021). asserts that educators in 21st-century education must ensure that students not only acquire knowledge but also apply it in practical ways. Besides, in alignment with this viewpoint, Wardani (2021) contends that effective pedagogical approaches of critical literacy could improve not only student's English proficiency but also other skills including leadership, self-branding, collaboration and networking, self-contribution, respect, critical thinking, and diverse thinking view.

The emergence of critical literacy or critical pedagogy represents a new paradigm in language education. Critical literacy pedagogy offers numerous benefits, including enhancing students' critical thinking abilities to analyze texts by deconstructing their codes and meanings, and prompting them to take action on social issues (Noviantiet al., 2020, Luke, A. ;2018). It encourages students to critically examine their positions on global issues by unpacking both the implicit and explicit meanings of texts (Gustine & Insani; 2019; Silvhiany et al., 2021). Furthermore, critical literacy fosters students' capacity to make insightful interpretations of texts (Wardani, 2021; Silvhiany et al., 2021). In language learning, critical literacy pedagogy aims to cultivate students' critical literacy in everyday life through text analysis (Wadeet al., (2019). This approach facilitates the development of critical awareness, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding, enabling students to connect with and comprehend their world on a deeper level (Gustine, 2019; Rahman et al., 2022; Weda et al., 2022; Junaid et al., 2024).

In classroom practice, critical literacy pedagogy incorporates various frameworks proposed by experts, each delineating how critical literacy is integrated into the teaching and learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These frameworks include the Four Resources Model by Luke and Freebody (1999), the Synthesis Model by Janks (2010), and the Four Dimensions Model by Lewinson et al., (2002). For the purpose of this study, the framework proposed by Lewinson et al., (2002) was utilized to analyze and categorize teachers' responses regarding their perceptions and understandings of critical literacy. This framework was selected due to its comprehensive coverage of critical literacy elements and its suitability for implementation in the Indonesian school context, facilitating the description of the relationship between critical literacy practices and real-world understanding (Gustine, 2019). The framework comprises four dimensions: disrupting commonplace notions, considering multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political issues, and taking action.

In the Asian educational context, critical literacy pedagogy remains relatively new, resulting in limited implementation within school practices, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Low et al., 2021; Gustine, 2019). Despite resource constraints and implementation challenges, several researchers have examined critical literacy practices in language learning. Scholars such as Gardner, (2018), Luke, 2018; El Soufi, (2019). Wadeet al., (2019); Gustine (2019), and Novianti et al., (2020) have contributed to this area of study. Novianti's research (Novianti et al., 2020) They provided a classroom-oriented framework suitable for EFL educators aiming to incorporate critical literacy, taking into account students' backgrounds, experiences, and local social justice concerns, all while aligning with the curriculum standards. Despite its practicality, this framework is intended as a flexible guide that teachers can tailor to their specific situations.

In the Indonesian context, Critical literacy has been explored by Gustine and Insani (Gustine & Insani (2019). Through their research findings, they showcased the teacher's implementation of the four resources model of critical literacy, enabling students to analyze narrative stories from a critical perspective As part of the critical reading process, students assumed various roles such as code breakers, text participants, text users, and text analysts. Initially, during this language instruction centered on critical literacy, students hesitated to question or critically evaluate the texts provided, viewing them as neutral or lacking political content. This highlights the necessity of incorporating critical pedagogy to cultivate students' abilities as critical readers.

Additionally, through her research, Gustine's (2019) also portrayed the essential role of the teacher in conducting critical literacy classroom and to rise students' ability to do critical literacy. In line with this, a scholar such as Meyes (2006) investigated teachers' perceptions of critical literacy, revealing diverse perspectives on analyzing text codes and meanings. While teachers generally exhibited positive attitudes toward essential practices of literacy for nurturing students' critical thinking skills, there was less consensus regarding concepts like relativism and literary canon (Meyes, 2006). She believes that the successful implementation of critical literacy in classrooms hinges on teachers having positive attitudes towards this teaching approach and actively engaging as practitioners of critical literacy themselves.

Under those consideration, it is essential to conduct an investigation in how teacher's perception and understanding of critical literacy practice before conducting further implementation of critical literacy in the EFL context. To address the disparity between beliefs and practices of critical literacy, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, this study explored EFL teachers' perceptions and comprehension of critical literacy pedagogy within the Indonesian school context.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, employing the convergent parallel design. According to Creswell (2002, p. 540), this design is adopted to compensate for the limitations of one type of data collection by incorporating another data collection procedure. This research design was selected to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, aiming to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the researched issue (Creswell, 2002, p. 540). The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then compared to establish relationships during the interpretation phase.

### **2.1. Participants**

This study engaged a cohort of 60 English educators, encompassing a diverse range of ages, teaching tenures, and genders. To procure quantitative insights, a random sampling approach was employed, ensuring every teacher in the population had an equal opportunity to participate in this investigation. No specific characteristics were mandated for participation, thus ensuring an unbiased representation. The participating teachers were solely queried about their perspectives on critical literacy in language acquisition, particularly in the context of English learning. Conversely, qualitative data were gathered through purposive sampling, selecting six teachers for interviews based on the richness of their responses in the initial survey.

### **2.2. Instruments**

The research employed a set of instruments comprising questionnaires and interview guidelines. These questionnaires were deemed valid and reliable, having been utilized in previous research conducted by Mayes (2006). They comprised both close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were divided into two main sections. The first section, containing 12 items, aimed to gauge teachers' beliefs regarding the concept of critical literacy. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The second section, comprised of 16 items, assessed the extent to which teachers' perceptions translated into practical classroom application, by probing their use of critical questioning techniques during text discussions. Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). Additionally, the final section of close-ended questions, consisting of 5 items, sought to gather information regarding the level of support teachers felt they received from various stakeholders.

These close-ended questions also aimed to ascertain the duration for which teachers had been exposed to or aware of critical literacy in language teaching. Teachers were queried about their sources of information on critical literacy, and 4 additional close-ended questions were administered to solicit confirmation and elaboration on their perspectives regarding critical literacy in language teaching contexts. To further validate the responses garnered from the questionnaires, short interviews were conducted with a subset of selected teachers, constituting 10% of the total sample size.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

The questionnaires were disseminated to 60 teachers through a combination of online and offline surveys. Upon data collection, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Quantitative data underwent descriptive statistical analysis, utilizing mathematical computations to derive means and standard deviations. Mean scores for each questionnaire item were collated to ascertain teachers' perceptions of critical literacy practices. These mean scores were

then compared against the Likert scale to draw conclusions regarding teachers' perspectives on critical literacy practices. The standard deviation was examined to determine whether the data exhibited a normal distribution; a standard deviation score of <1 indicated normal distribution.

Conversely, qualitative data were subjected to analysis through coding techniques. Teachers' responses were meticulously categorized into thematic clusters, and the interpretation of each theme was utilized to address the research inquiries.

### 3. Result

#### 3.1. Critical literacy perceptions and understanding

Sixty English teachers, exhibiting diversity in age, teaching experience, and gender, participated in completing the questionnaires. The questionnaire responses underwent mathematical computation to derive mean and standard deviation scores. Mean scores for each questionnaire item were utilized to draw conclusions regarding teachers' perceptions of critical literacy practices, particularly in language learning, with a focus on EFL contexts. Additionally, standard deviation testing was conducted to assess whether the data exhibited a normal distribution.

Table 1.1 below illustrates the analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding critical literacy, drawing from various theories of critical literacy. The 12 items encompass both positive and negative viewpoints on critical literacy. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 11 reflect positive perspectives, whereas items 7, 8, 9, and 12 represent negative viewpoints. The data were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 signifies "strongly disagree," 2 indicates "disagree," 3 denotes "neutral," 4 represents "agree," and 5 signifies "strongly agree."

**Table 1. Critical literacy perceptions and understanding**

Statements	M	SD
Students need to understand that text is written based on particular historical, socio-economic and political contexts.	3,73	0,92
Students need to understand that writers produced text to deliver their intention.	4,00	0,58
Students need to develop ability to critique and resist texts.	4,10	0,66
Critical Literacy equips students with the multi-literacies to face the complexities of the modern world.	4,18	0,68
Critical Literacy 'liberates' the student to see the world and their place within it with a new perspective	4,03	0,69
Critical Literacy leads to students taking action as a result of reading: to challenge injustice and benefit society	4,11	0,58
Critical Literacy encourages relativism, denying students the opportunity to learn timeless and universal truths.	3,47	1,01
Critical Literacy undermines the literary Canon, allowing students to be taught 'sludge' alongside literature.	3,58	0,79
Critical Literacy allows teachers to impose their own political prejudices onto students.	2,37	0,80
Critical Literacy pre-empts basic skills: students need to be able to process the meaning in texts before they can be critically literate.	4,05	0,79
Critical Literacy oversimplifies complex literary theory, leading to simplistic understanding.	3,47	0,77
Critical Literacy turns students away from the joy of reading.	2,12	0,88

The data depicted above reveals that teachers held predominantly positive perceptions towards items 1-6 and item 10, as evidenced by mean scores approaching 4, indicating an inclination towards agreement with the statements provided. This suggests an overall positive outlook on critical literacy among teachers. Conversely, for item 8 (M = 3.58), which signifies a negative perspective on critical literacy pedagogy, teachers expressed agreement with a mean score closely aligned with point 4. This implies a negative perception among teachers regarding critical literacy's purported undermining of literary canon. However, regarding item 9, which also denotes negative perceptions of critical literacy, the majority of teachers responded with disagreement (2.37). This indicates a belief among teachers that critical literacy does not compel them to impose their political perspectives onto students.

### 3.2. Critical literacy questions in teaching practices

Table 2 below delves into the strategies utilized by teachers to integrate critical literacy into the classroom, primarily through the use of critical literacy questioning techniques with students. The questionnaire comprises 16 items, each corresponding to one of the four dimensions of critical literacy. Items 1 through 10 pertain to disrupting commonplace notions, while items 11 focus on exploring multiple viewpoints. Items 12 through 16 address socio-political issues, with item 16 specifically targeting the dimension of taking a stand and promoting social justice.

The data below presents the mean score and standard deviation of each item. The responses were analyzed using 4 point-Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 that indicated, 1= never, 2= sometimes, 3= often, 4= very often.

**Table 2. Critical literacy questions in teaching practices**

No.	Statements	M	SD
1.	What is the type of this text?	2,95	0,87
2.	Who is the writer of this text?	2,12	0,90
3.	What is the text tells us about?	3,30	0,67
4.	How the character in this text appears?	2,67	0,95
5.	From what context did the writer create this text?	2,27	0,84
6.	Who is the target audience for this text?	2,25	0,93
7.	Why has this text been written/ produced?	2,33	0,88
8.	How is the topic written about? (Literary/ visual techniques)	2,00	0,82
9.	What is the text trying to make you feel/ think? (Effect)	2,32	0,77
10.	What other ways of writing about the topic are there?	1,87	0,79
11.	Does the text have a balanced point of view? Whose voice is heard? Whose voices/ viewpoints are missing from this text?	1,61	0,83
12.	What is your response to the text?	2,85	0,82
13.	How is your response to the text affected by your background/beliefs?	2,13	0,96
14.	Is there a 'right' or 'wrong' view on this issue, or is it just a matter of interpretation?	2,07	0,91
15.	Do you agree with the information in the text? Does the text change the way you think?	2,42	0,94
16.	What social action will you take as a result of reading this text?	2,18	0,95

From the data analysis, it could be concluded that most of teachers often employed questions number 1, 3, 4, and 12 when discussing a text with students. However, most of them rarely gave the rest of the questions (questions

number 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16) in text discussion. Even questions number 10 (M = 1,87) and 11 (M = 1,61) have low mean score. It indicates that these types of questions were almost never be employed in text discussion.

### 3.3. Support perceives on critical literacy practices

The following table discusses the supporting factors perceived by teachers in shaping and implementing critical literacy beliefs in EFL classroom. The data analyzed using 5 point of Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Point 1 indicates “strongly unsupported”, point 2 indicates “unsupported”, point 3 indicates “unsure”, point 4 indicates “supported”, point 5 indicates “strongly supported”

**Table 3. Supporting factors of critical literacy beliefs**

No.	Statements	M		SD
1.	Colleagues	3,57	4	1,06
2..	School principal	3,58	4	0,96
3.	Teacher organizations	3,55	4	0,96
4.	Students' parents	3,32	3	0,81
5.	Media	3,65	4	1,00

In terms of supporting factors that shaped their beliefs and implementation on critical literacy, majority teachers feel supported by the four factors; they are colleagues, school principal, teacher organizations, and media. The highest mean score of support comes from media (M = 3,65%). Meanwhile the lowest support comes from students' parents (M = 3,32), as majorly teachers had hesitated belief whether students' parents will support their beliefs and implementation of critical literacy pedagogy in EFL classroom.

### 3.4. Critical literacy on actual practice in ELT

Information pertaining to teachers' demographics, including their familiarity with the term "critical literacy" and their methods of acquiring information about it, was collected. Additionally, open-ended questions were administered to gather more nuanced insights into their perceptions. These questions explored the teachers' interpretations of critical literacy, whether they had implemented critical literacy pedagogy, and if so, how they had done so. Alternatively, if they had not implemented it, the reasons behind this decision were queried. Furthermore, teachers were asked to share their perspectives on the potential impact of critical literacy on students' learning and how their personal characteristics influenced their perceptions of critical literacy.

The subsequent table addresses the duration for which teachers have been acquainted with the concept of critical literacy pedagogy.

**Table 4. Teachers familiarity of critical literacy pedagogy**

	Never heard	< 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years
Total	17	28	13	2
Percentage	28,3%	46,7%	21,7%	3,3%

The table above showed that majority teacher has heard about critical literacy less than one year (28 teachers). Even as many as 17 teachers never heard about critical literacy terminology. And very few teachers have already known this teaching method for about 6-10 (2 teachers). It indicated that critical literacy is a new concept for the respondent teachers.

This following table discusses how teachers perceive information about critical literacy. Most of teachers have known about critical literacy pedagogy notion from internet (27 teachers), pre-service teachers (23 teachers), and journal reading (26 teachers).

**Table 5. below presents types of sources that influence teachers in shaping critical literacy perspectives**

	Pre service teacher	Teacher training/ professional development	Journal reading	Internet source	Colleague	Others
Total	23	5	26	27	17	4
Percentage	22,5 %	4,9 %	25,5 %	26,5 %	16,7 %	3,9 %

However, this table below presents the outlines of teachers' response on the questions of critical literacy meaning. These questions reveal how far teachers know about critical literacy concept. The teachers' responses are coding into 4 themes based on response they gave to these questions.

**Table 6. teachers' response on critical literacy meaning**

Teachers' Understanding On Critical Literacy Concept	Teachers	Percentage
No Idea	14	23%
Understanding Text By Doing Language Analysis	17	28%
Understanding Text By Giving Critical Comments	26	43%
Analyzing Text By Breaking Code And Meaning Making And Taking Action As A Result Of That Process Of Analyzing	3	5%

A total of 14 teachers indicated that they were unfamiliar with the concept of critical literacy, with some of them confessing to never having encountered it before. Additionally, 17 teachers demonstrated a superficial understanding, while 26 teachers exhibited a slightly deeper comprehension, focusing on language analysis and offering critical commentary. However, these levels of understanding fell short of providing a comprehensive grasp of the essence of critical literacy. It is important to note that critical literacy extends beyond mere language skills, as it entails fostering critical thinking to decipher both the implicit and explicit meanings within texts (Huang, 2012). Interestingly, only 3 teachers were able to articulate a clear understanding of critical literacy concepts, although they struggled to elucidate the framework for implementing critical literacy in language learning.

The response of questions about whether or not teachers have implemented critical literacy was analyzed by categorizing them into three themes. Short interview was also conducted to get better understanding of teachers' response on these questions. The result is presents by this following table.

**Table 7. Teachers' implementation of critical literacy pedagogy in EFL classroom**

Implementation of critical literacy	Teachers	Percentage
No	33	55%
Yes	21	35%
Neutral	6	10%

Out of the sample, a significant portion of 21 teachers, comprising 35%, claimed to have implemented critical literacy in their EFL classrooms. However, upon further exploration through open-ended questions and brief interviews, it became apparent that some teachers overlooked crucial activities integral to a comprehensive critical literacy approach. These activities include disrupting commonplace assumptions, exploring multiple perspectives, delving into socio-political issues, and fostering a commitment to social justice. In their discussions of texts, these teachers primarily focused on basic elements such as identifying the topic and summarizing the text's content, rather than delving into deeper analysis. They tended to prioritize language aspects over thought-provoking inquiries, such as considering whose voices were represented and whose were absent.

A noteworthy 10% of teachers remain uncertain about whether they have integrated critical literacy pedagogy into their classrooms. They express unfamiliarity with the term "critical literacy pedagogy," yet acknowledge attempts to foster students' higher-order thinking during text discussions by facilitating small group conversations about various issues.

Nonetheless, akin to prior cases, these educators admit to omitting the thought-provoking questions emphasized in critical literacy pedagogy.

On the other hand, a substantial 55% of teachers concede to never having implemented critical literacy pedagogy in their EFL classrooms. They attribute this reluctance to both personal and student-related factors. These educators perceive critical literacy as a novel approach, unfamiliar to both themselves and their students. They harbor doubts about their own proficiency in implementing this teaching method, as well as concerns regarding their students' readiness to engage critically with the material.

### 3.5. Impact of critical literacy practices in ELT

In terms of teachers' belief on the effect of critical literacy to students understanding on text, teachers' responses are presented in table below.

**Table 8. teachers' beliefs on the impact of critical literacy pedagogy in EFL context**

Impact	Total
Positive impact	52 teachers
Negative impact	9 teachers
Neutral	teachers

Fifty-two teachers expressed positive beliefs regarding critical literacy, emphasizing its multifaceted benefits. They perceive critical literacy as a potent tool for fostering deeper comprehension of texts, facilitating real-world connections, and nurturing critical thinking skills. Moreover, they view it as instrumental in cultivating a democratic classroom environment where students feel empowered to voice their ideas freely. These educators recognize critical literacy's capacity to instill problem-solving abilities, particularly in navigating contemporary socio-political challenges. Furthermore, they attest to its role in promoting reading habits, expanding vocabulary, and engendering a nuanced understanding of texts by probing both implicit and explicit meanings, as well as strengths and weaknesses. Importantly, they highlight its role in fostering students' awareness of societal phenomena and fostering a mindset of inquiry, encouraging them to question and critically assess information rather than accepting it unquestioningly. Despite acknowledging the positive impacts of critical literacy on students, these teachers lament the gap between belief and practice, attributing it to various barriers they encounter in implementing critical literacy pedagogy in the EFL classroom.

Nevertheless, some teachers harbor reservations about critical literacy, acknowledging both its positive and negative impacts. Among them, nine teachers articulated concerns about potential drawbacks alongside the benefits. They caution against an excess of freedom afforded to students, fearing it may lead to disruptive behavior or create an imbalance in the classroom dynamic. Additionally, they express doubts about the readiness of their students, particularly at the secondary level, to engage in critical literacy due to perceived deficits in competency. Moreover, these educators voice apprehensions about the demanding nature of implementing critical literacy pedagogy, citing the considerable effort required to guide students in developing critical literacy skills. Furthermore, they highlight the risk of students becoming disengaged or bored with continuous critical analysis, particularly among those with lower academic achievement.

### 3.6. Critical literacy on personal character

The prevailing consensus among teachers is that successful implementation of critical literacy pedagogy in language learning hinges upon the educators themselves being critical thinkers foremost. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of teachers possessing the ability to engage in critical literacy practices. This is crucial as EFL students rely on their instructors to navigate the complexities of language and meaning, requiring guidance in deciphering text and selecting thought-provoking materials conducive to developing their critical thinking skills. Moreover, teachers are seen as essential facilitators in encouraging students to analyze texts from various perspectives. The majority of educators assert that qualities such as open-mindedness, critical thinking, democratic principles, curiosity, honesty, and an appreciation for diversity are imperative for effectively engaging with language works in a critical manner. As such, teachers express a commitment to nurturing these attributes within themselves to better equip them for implementing critical literacy pedagogy in the EFL classroom.



## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Teachers' perceptions and understanding in critical literacy

The prevailing sentiment among teachers underscores a positive outlook on critical literacy beliefs. Many educators advocate for students to recognize that texts are imbued with inherent biases and are far from neutral entities. They emphasize the importance of cultivating students' capacity to critically analyze texts from multiple perspectives, empowering them to become agents of change in fostering social justice. These findings resonate with prior research, such as the study conducted by Mayes (2006), which similarly revealed teachers' positive perceptions of critical literacy.

Moreover, the majority of teachers express a firm belief that critical literacy fosters students' awareness of social phenomena by encouraging them to adopt diverse viewpoints. This sentiment is echoed in the research by Lewison et al. (2002), where respondents highlighted how critical literacy facilitates meaningful discussions on societal issues, such as inequality, within the context of literature.

Teachers still hold ambivalent perceptions regarding the notion that critical literacy aligns with relativism, as evidenced by a relatively low mean score of 3.47. Teachers still hold ambivalent perceptions regarding the notion that critical literacy aligns with relativism, as evidenced by a relatively low mean score of 3.47, closely approaching the midpoint of the Likert scale. To gain deeper insights into this response, open-ended questions and short interviews were utilized to elucidate both positive and negative perspectives among teachers. The hesitancy surrounding this statement may stem from cultural factors, with some educators expressing a desire to uphold the cultural heritage embedded within classical literary works. Conversely, those who endorse the idea cite the relevance of postmodern literary works in contemporary discourse, viewing them as more fitting subjects for critical examination in the current era.

However, a significant portion of teachers also harbor negative beliefs regarding critical literacy, as evidenced by responses to items 8 and 10. These educators express agreement with the notion that critical literacy imposes limitations on the exploration of classical literary works while emphasizing contemporary literary issues. Such sentiments may stem from a lack of comprehensive understanding of the critical literacy concept. Contrary to this perception, Machin-Mastromatteo, (2021) asserts that critical literacy affords opportunities to engage with both classical and modern literary works, utilizing both traditional and digital media platforms. Further insights on the misconception that critical literacy constrains exploration of classic literature are provided by respondents in Meyes' research. One teacher interviewed in Meyes' study contends that critical literacy not only facilitates discussions of classic literature but also encourages deeper examination through diverse perspectives.

When it comes to the questions commonly utilized in critical literacy practices, the questionnaires were structured around the four dimensions of critical literacy proposed by Lewison et al., (2002). Questions numbered 1 to 10 were designed to reflect the application of critical literacy in disrupting the commonplace. Within this dimension, the majority of teachers exhibited low mean scores, with an average mean score of 2.4 for this set of questions. This suggests that these teachers infrequently incorporate such questioning techniques when analyzing texts. Instead, their focus tends to center on inquiries pertaining to the type of text and its contextual background. However, critical literacy diverges from conventional literacy by emphasizing specific issues. This focus of critical literacy is elucidated by McLaughlin & deVoogd.

"Critical literacy centers on power dynamics, encouraging reflection, transformation, and action. It delves into the complexity of problems, with techniques that are flexible and tailored to specific contexts. Embracing multiple perspectives is integral to the practice of critical literacy." (McLaughlin & deVoogd, 2004)

Therefore, when implementing critical literacy pedagogy, teachers must not solely concentrate on language components and textual context analysis; they must also prioritize critical literacy aspects.

### 4.2. Open-ended question and short interview

Open-ended questions shed light on how teachers engage in classroom discussions centered on text analysis, particularly within the framework of critical literacy pedagogy. From the analysis of these responses, it emerges that 33 teachers admitted to never having implemented critical literacy pedagogy. This finding aligns with Wardani's study, which suggests a preference among both English teachers and students for conventional literacy over critical literacy (Wardani, 2021) However, given students' need for a deeper understanding of texts, it becomes imperative for teachers to guide them and design activities that cultivate critical thinking, particularly in text analysis. Many teachers disclosed a lack of adequate knowledge on how to integrate critical literacy into the curriculum or lesson plans, coupled with a lack of

confidence in its efficacy for their students. They expressed doubts regarding their students' competence in critically analyzing texts from multiple perspectives, attributing this barrier to cultural factors prevalent among teachers in Indonesia. This reluctance to embrace new challenges and innovations mirrors Fajardo's argument that teachers should not underestimate students' ability to analyze texts critically. By guiding students to discern the inherent relationship between language and power embedded within texts, teachers can foster an awareness that language learning and textual interpretation are influenced by political, economic, social, and cultural factors (Wardani, 2021) Therefore, teachers must empower and inspire students to adopt an active and critical approach to understanding both the world and the written word in its entirety. By doing so, educators can cultivate students who perceive themselves as agents of peace and social justice, contributing to the creation of a more humane society. Consequently, the implementation of critical literacy becomes instrumental in nurturing the intellectual growth and ethical development of students, as advocated by Wardani (2021)

Some teachers expressed concerns about potential negative impacts of critical literacy pedagogy, suggesting that it grants students too much freedom and may lead to boredom. However, this notion is misguided, as evidenced by research conducted by Kuo, which emphasizes that critical literacy pedagogy involves designing classroom activities that align with students' interests, backgrounds, and learning experiences (Novianti et al., 2020). In this approach, teachers still play a guiding role, ensuring that activities are tailored to students' needs rather than allowing unfettered choice. Moreover, the essence lies in providing students with the freedom to express their opinions and thoughts respectfully, without promoting animosity towards others. Additionally, concerns about disruptive behavior from critical students are unfounded, as Noviant's research (2020) suggests that critical literacy fosters an environment where students appreciate and respect each other's viewpoints and ideas. It appears that these negative perceptions among teachers stem from a lack of understanding of how to effectively implement critical literacy, exacerbated by limited practical experience and resources.

Teachers have expressed a strong desire for professional development opportunities focused on implementing critical literacy in EFL classrooms. Consequently, comprehensive support from all stakeholders becomes imperative. Professional development programs that provide teachers with both theoretical understanding and practical activities for integrating critical literacy into their teaching practices are essential. Another effective approach to enhancing teachers' understanding of critical literacy practices is to involve them in collaborative research endeavors. Numerous studies on critical literacy have been conducted in partnership with teachers (Gustine & Insani, 2019; Silvhiany et al., 2021; Novianti et al., 2020; Freire, 2020), offering educators firsthand experience in implementing critical literacy in EFL classrooms under expert guidance. Such collaborative initiatives prove highly beneficial for teachers, enabling them to gain invaluable insights and practical knowledge in the effective application of critical literacy principles.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Majority of teachers acknowledge the potential benefits of critical literacy for students in language learning, particularly in English. They hold positive beliefs regarding critical literacy pedagogy as a means to enhance text analysis comprehension. However, these positive attitudes have not translated into widespread implementation of critical literacy pedagogy in EFL classrooms. Although some teachers have attempted to integrate critical literacy, their practices often lack systematic and comprehensive approaches. None of them have utilized established critical literacy frameworks proposed by experts, possibly due to a lack of understanding of how to integrate such pedagogy into the curriculum or lesson plans.

Comprehensive support from various stakeholders is essential to improve teachers' understanding of critical literacy pedagogy concepts and frameworks. Therefore, it is recommended to provide professional development opportunities for EFL teachers to gain insights into critical literacy practices in the classroom. Pre-service teacher education institutions should also incorporate training on critical literacy practices into their curriculum. Infusing teacher education with a more critical approach, involving educational, political, and economic reforms, will cultivate more democratic teachers who integrate these values into their classroom practices. Additionally, policymakers and curriculum developers are encouraged to prioritize the integration of critical literacy into the national curriculum to address the urgent needs of the global era.

Further research on critical literacy should explore more advanced methodologies and involve a broader scope of teachers to provide a deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs. Action research, utilizing the background information from this paper, could offer practical insights and strategies for teachers.

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