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An Exploration of Teachers' Practices of Critical (Visual) Literacy and the Factors Impeding the Implementation Thereof

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ABSTRACT
Although there are many definitions and context-specific use of critical literacy and critical visual literacy, there is unfortunately very little support to teachers on how to implement it in their classrooms. This desktop research thus explored the practices of, and the challenges pre-service and service teachers face when dealing with critical literacy and critical visual literacy. Data collection included online articles on the subject matter from the year 2005 to the present in various contexts; to understand critical literacy and critical visual literacy practices among teachers around the world. The study discussed the various accepted definitions of critical literacy and critical visual literacy. It then discusses their place in an Apartheid ridden South Africa. The literature reviewed revealed that teachers face internal, contextual, and external barriers in their attempts to teach critical literacy and critical visual literacy. In addition, while they have the power to overcome certain barriers, they do not have such power with others. Ultimately, this research ends with establishing the gaps in terms of research around critical visual literacy and the pedagogical practices thereof, and suggested areas for future research to better understand teachers' challenges.

Keywords: *critical literacy; critical visual literacy; critical literacy theory; teachers' practices*

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INTRODUCTION
Due to postmodern globalization, information is shared on different platforms and at rapid rates between varying contexts, cultures, and opinions. Critical literary means taking texts, like advertisements, and "[investigating] how language [is] used to maintain or reinforce power relations."[1] Moreover, Janks, et al. support that critical literacy involves teachers and learners discussing the "politics" of the text by asking questions about whose ideas are expressed more than others and why, since no text is neutral.[2]

Where critical literacy involves the interrogation of all types of texts, critical visual literacy deals particularly with "education that enhances understanding of the role of images in representation and communication, especially in the media."[3] Learners need to be aware that what they see in texts is an indication of the affairs of their societies and critical literacy means to critique these to better their world

[1] Ana Ferreira, "Critical Literacy in South Africa: Tracking the Chameleon," in *Preparing Globally Minded Literacy Teachers* (Routledge, 2019), 103.
[2] H. Janks, *Literacy and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[3] Denise Newfield, "From Visual Literacy to Critical Visual Literacy: An Analysis of Educational Materials.," *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 10, no. 1 (2011): 82.

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by challenging why certain parties are or are not represented in a variety of texts. Learners, especially from a country with a troubled history such as South Africa where "under apartheid, … the education system prepared children differently for the positions they were expected to occupy in [society]. The curriculum played a powerful role in reinforcing inequality."[4] For Paulo Freire, the father of critical literacy, education through critical pedagogy should work to bring awareness to the existing marginalising systems and ensure that history is not repeated.

The foregoing, therefore, focuses on the need to rethink how literacy has been conceptualised over the years. Literacy, or the idea of being literate, has for a long time been associated with skills centered around the ability to read and write, in most cases, the English language. This is a fallacy and as explained by Cho, "this skills-oriented approach to literacy considers literacy as a set of static, decontextualised, and discrete skills that can be applied anywhere once it is taught as a packaged set."[5] This misconception that literacy is a matter of encoding and decoding skills reduces it to dehumanising forms of assessments that perceive a learner incapable if they have low literacy levels.

Capability then attributes to being literate, and being literate in today's society means one is in a position to get a good job and contribute to economic development. This dominant view of literacy encourages teachers to take the role of transmitting knowledge in such a "way that equips learners to gain foundational knowledge which will ultimately allow them to gain skills needed to join the job market."[6] Critical literacy, on the contrary, motivates teachers, in their instructional activities, to move away from this capitalistic nature.

Teachers are encouraged to adopt a rather political stance that encourages the democratisation of their immediate classrooms but also South Africa as a whole. Teachers should offer, to learners, a type of education that does not perpetuate neoliberalism, but questions it. In other words, "an overtly political orientation to teaching and learning and to the cultural, ideological, and sociolinguistic content of the [language] curriculum."[7] As a way of explanation, teachers should use critical literacy to promote social justice by enlightening learners on the power dynamics present in language (visual language) and how each influences and positions them. As put by Freire and Macedo, understanding that an advertisement that sees African hair as dirty is not a neutral nor decontextualised advertisement.[8] It is situated from the ideologies of certain people and so reading that advertisement is "reading the world". Due to its context-specific nature, where each school needs to problematise issues relating to each school's histories from that of the learners, their parents, teachers and even as far the communities they are in, teachers have a great responsibility. In that respect, this research explores how teachers approach critical visual literacy in the classroom and the challenges thereof.

To cover every aspect of the current research's goal, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: (i). How do teachers teach critical literacy and critical visual literacy? (ii). What challenges do teachers face when teaching critical literacy and critical visual literacy in the classroom? In addition, the aim of this study is to discover the knowledge and skills teachers need to teach critical visual literacy. This study has the following objectives: (i). To explore teachers' practices of critical literacy/ critical visual literacy; (ii). To explore the challenges teachers face when teaching critical visual literacy in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring Critical Literacy and Critical Visual Literacy

The South African educational system, like many educational systems around the world, deems a good language learner as "one who has a good vocabulary, writes neatly, spells correctly and reads fluently

[4] Department of Education, *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 for Schools* (Pretoria : Department of Education, 2002).4.
[5] Hyesun Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy," 2015.
[6] 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): 1–7.
[7] Allan Luke, "Critical Literacy: Foundational Notes," *Theory into Practice* 51, no. 1 (2012): 4–11.
[8] Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, "Literacy: Reading the Word and the World. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers" (Inc, 1987).

with expression and comprehension."[9] For a colonial-history-rich country like South Africa, the issue with this organization of the school system will, according to Torres, make space for colonialization not only to thrive but to survive amongst liberated generations.[10] This is because many aspects of language and literature that are exposed to learners in the classroom are situated. In other words, they are of a particular context and where, according to Giroux and McLaren context is incredibly important to critical pedagogy as context offers knowledge on where and how literature was created which provides insight into its transmission.[11] For Janks and McKinney, this context is usually that of powerful groups "shaped by coloniality."[12]

The present paper is underpinned by the Critical Literacy Theory. Critical literacy is the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life."[13] Critical literacy becomes the opportunity for educators and learners to identify "the problematic imbalance"[14] of the visual content to which they are exposed. As supported by Janks and McKinney, critical literacy "is important in the South African context where access to education often ignores diversity and expects assimilation to white middle-class norms and colonizing practices"[15] and further maintained by Dixon & Mendelowitz that the inequalities of Apartheid that marginalised People of Colour needs to liaise through emancipatory education which includes a critical pedagogy.[16]

Critical pedagogy "is projected as teaching for social justice [and] intellectual liberation."[17] In other words, educators have the responsibility of conducting lessons that work to dismantle inequality in any form and at every possible level. Without an emphasis on critical literacy, certain views (like European hair types and skin being better as seen in some advertisements) will further perpetuate stereotypes and expand the exclusion of South Africans [in this case learners] marginalised by these dominating views. While critical literacy can work to attack many inequalities, the South African education system needs to utilise it to play a part in disintegrating inequalities caused by Apartheid. Furthermore, Mbelani adds that "one text is the product of many levels of production and reception, and powerful discourses can be introduced at any of them."[18] In this case, it is the responsibility of the teacher to introduce these discourses of resistance, such as critical visual literacy. What then is critical visual literacy?

Education in "visual literacy enhances understanding of the role and function of images in representation and communication, especially in the media."[19] In layman's terms, it is understanding that the images that are seen all around us communicate to us certain messages, feelings and ideologies. Critical visual literacy is then understanding where each message, feeling and ideology is based and questioning whether each message, feeling and ideology is accurate for a specific contextualised individual or group of people and reading, feeling and most importantly, acting against those that are not.

For learners, "critical visual literacy would reveal that several textual and contextual features contribute to the readers' interpellation."[20] So, there are factors about the contexts and backgrounds (race, age, social standing, etc.) of learners that determine how they respond to certain visuals. Thus, they need to be aware of these factors to realise when they are manipulated and to be prepared to resist. For this to

[9] Hilary Janks and Carolyn McKinney, "Critical Literacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *The Handbook of Critical Literacies* (Routledge, 2021), 229.
[10] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 243.
[11] H. A. Giroux and P. McLaren, " Teacher Education and the Politics of Democratic Reform ," in *Teachers as Intellectuals: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, ed. H. A. Giroux (New York, NY: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1988), 158–76.
[12] Janks and McKinney, "Critical Literacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa." 299.
[13] Luke, "Critical Literacy: Foundational Notes." 5.
[14] Janks and McKinney, "Critical Literacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa." 229.
[15] Janks and McKinney, "Critical Literacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa." 229.
[16] K. Dixon and B. Mendelowitz, "Giving Voice to the Citizen Scholar: Generating Critical Thinking by Combining Traditional and Non-Traditional Genres in a First-Year English Course ," in *Universities, the Citizen Scholar and the Future of Higher Education,* , ed. J. Arvanitakis and D. J. Hornsby (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 81–10.
[17] Naomi Nkealah and John Simango, "Using Critical Pedagogy in English Education: Disjunctures between Pre-Service Teachers' Preparation and Opportunities for Implementation," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 90 (2023): 71.
[18] Madeyandile Mbelani, "Exploring the Impact of Discourses in Advancing Visual Literacy: A Case of Interpreting Advertisements," *English Academy Review* 36, no. 1 (2019): 49.
[19] Newfield, "From Visual Literacy to Critical Visual Literacy: An Analysis of Educational Materials." 82.
[20] Newfield, "From Visual Literacy to Critical Visual Literacy: An Analysis of Educational Materials." 82.

take place, the start is the school, as "critical pedagogy is the technique that can provide teachers, learners, and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools play within a race, class, and gender-divided society."[21] This is the responsibility of the teacher.

A research-rich challenge is that of the theoretical knowledge of critical visual literacy among schoolteachers. While Boakye, Olifant, and Cekiso's South African-based research had four out of four participants who had little to no understanding of critical visual literacy.[22] In the United States, Cho identified that many of the twenty research participants "had little prior knowledge of critical literacy."[23] For Aliakbari and Allahmoradi, the forty Brazilian language teachers knew very little about critical literacy.[24] The uninformed participants each have one thing in common: they misinterpret critical literacy for critical thinking.[25] In addition, Cho found that critical literacy is often associated with higher-order thinking founded in Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Levels.[26] This misunderstanding is apparent in one of Cho's participants who states that "[he/she] was thinking more along the lines of critically analysing the text itself rather than the social aspects of the texts,[27]" as well as in Gin's Indonesian-based research where "almost all the respondents confused critical literacy with critical thinking."[28] The problem with this misunderstanding is that teachers will assume because they think critical literacy is critical thinking when they engage in critical thinking then they are engaging in critical literacy.

As dangerous as it is mistaking critical literacy for critical thinking, is being knowledgeable about critical literacy but engaging in it incorrectly. For example, Winney saw that although a few junior teachers in Windsor understood certain factors of critical literacy like "questioning, forming opinions and disrupting the commonplace"[29] none of them was asking questions, encouraging opinions or disrupting the commonplace in ways that "recognize and question how issues of race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, etc. are presented within texts."[30] If an advertisement places white skin as good skin and a teacher asks about the prejudice of the producer of the advertisement, the questioning only touches base on the side the producer is on and does not go into detail about who this prejudice affects or even where it comes from. While some teachers are eager to challenge power when dealing with visual literacy, not doing it right can pose a risk to emancipatory education.

This lack of know-how is, according to Curdt-Christiansen, Boakye et al and Rosos, Tubola, Artocilli & Gepila, because many teachers were not taught critical literacy during their primary, secondary, and pre-service years with exposure being only at postgraduate level, during research participation and workshops only a select few are a part of.[31] Two out of the eight teachers in Rosos et al's study disclosed that they had learnt about critical literacy in their postgraduate years and another two through teacher development courses provided by the school.[32] Surprisingly for Lee, his Masters students at an Indiana university who are also in-service teachers, all stated that they had not "[recalled] taking courses related to critical literacy in their undergraduate or graduate programs."[33]

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[21] Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," *Continuum, New York*, 1970, 9.
[22] Naomi Boakye, Tilla Olifant, and Madoda Cekiso, "Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Literacy: A Case Study from Two South African Township Schools," *Language Matters* 52, no. 2 (2021): 61.
[23] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!'..." 73.
[24] Mohammad Aliakbari and Nazal Allahmoradi, "On Iranian School Teachers' Perceptions of the Principles of Critical Pedagogy," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 4, no. 1 (2012): 154–71.
[25] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy"; Boakye, Olifant, and Cekiso, "Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Literacy: A Case Study from Two South African Township Schools"; R.W. Kimmerer, " A Conversation with Dr Robin Wall Kimmerer " (Forestry and Simon K.Y. Lee Global Lounge and Resource Centre., 2021).
[26] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!'..."
[27] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!'..." 73.
[28] 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): 533.
[29] Kelly Winney, "Junior Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacy.," 2005.35-36.
[30] Winney, "Junior Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacy."44.
[31] Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen, "Competing Priorities: Singaporean Teachers' Perspectives on Critical Literacy," *International Journal of Educational Research* 49, no. 6 (2010): 184–94; Boakye, Olifant, and Cekiso, "Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Literacy: A Case Study from Two South African Township Schools"; Joseph G Rosos et al., "Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers," *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences: Proceedings* 11, no. 1 (s) (2022): pp-303.
[32] Rosos et al., "Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers." 307.
[33] Cheu-jey Lee, "Myths about Critical Literacy: What Teachers Need to Unlearn.," *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 7, no. 1 (2011): 96.

With this in mind, Janks and McKinney conclude that teacher programmes are not doing what is needed to prepare teachers to teach critical literacy, the focus, rather is on teaching teachers to teach learners to "[become] literate [through the] decoding and comprehension of texts."[34] This ill preparation brings into the field teachers who have no clue of what critical literacy is and without this knowledge, they do not have awareness of the gaps present in their teachings from not engaging learners in critical pedagogy.[35]

However, and interestingly enough, teachers who do have a formal education in their undergraduate and postgraduate years have been found to not be able to exercise their knowledge and skills once in the school environment. This is, according to Mendelowitz, Ferreira, & Dixon, because of school policies that prevent novice teachers from practicing certain critical pedagogy lessons.[36] Nkealah and Simango add to this by discussing that while some student teachers are given the opportunity at teacher education programmes to teach for social transformation, "once students graduate, they enter a school context that is different from the university one of teaching and learning."[37] This therefore implies that there is a conflict between how teachers are prepared at teacher education programmes and what they can do in schools regulated by policies. This not only highlights the challenge of teachers not being able to implement their knowledge and skills due to dominant policies but it also highlights a gap between teacher education programmes as preparers of educators and the Department of Basic Education as the beneficiaries of those educators.[38] It is against this background that the present study brings to the fore the need to explore teachers' practices of critical literacy/critical visual literacy and the factors that impede the implementation thereof.

METHODOLOGY

This research design is qualitative. Its qualitative nature helps comprehend teachers' practice and the challenges they face with implementing critical literacy and critical visual literacy in the classroom. This study has adopted a desktop study. A desktop "research covers a wide range of ways in which one can carry out a robust study by gathering data from existing sources"[39] to acquire information rather than through physical investigations. With a desktop study, information has been collected through secondary data to "[explore critical literacy and critical visual literacy] by gaining understandings via interpretation" of existing information.[40] Data has been collected from literature based in the South African and international contexts from the years 2005 to currently. Going as far back as 16 years gives this research an advantage of reporting critical literacy and critical visual literacy practices and experiences of teachers from different generations and if, over time, some differences and changes presented themselves.

An extensive desktop study of literature was reviewed from online websites such as ProQuest, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Original Research, International Journal of Instruction, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis Online, Routledge Online, AOSIS, SAGE and J-STOR until August 16, 2023. The online search focused on keywords and concepts like "critical literacy in the classroom", "critical visual literacy in the classroom", "teacher beliefs of critical literacy", "teacher practices of critical literacy" and "challenges in teaching critical visual literacy". This review defines critical literacy in line with Freire and Macedo of education being for social change to achieve equity.[41] As a result, the search obtained articles relating to this pedagogy and teachers' association with it.

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[34] Janks and McKinney, "Critical Literacies in Post-Apartheid South Africa." 228.
[35] Peter Oluwaseun Merisi and Ansurie Pillay, "Understanding What Shapes English Education Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Grammar," *English in Education* 54, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 346–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2020.1740056.
[36] Dixon and Mendelowitz, "Giving Voice to the Citizen Scholar: Generating Critical Thinking by Combining Traditional and Non-Traditional Genres in a First-Year English Course ."
[37] Nkealah and Simango, "Using Critical Pedagogy in English Education: Disjunctures between Pre-Service Teachers' Preparation and Opportunities for Implementation."70.
[38] Merisi and Pillay, "Understanding What Shapes English Education Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Grammar."
[39] B. Bassot, *Doing Qualitative Desk-Based Research: A Practical; Guide to Writing an Excellent Dissertation* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022).7.
[40] Bassot, *Doing Qualitative Desk-Based Research: A Practical; Guide to Writing an Excellent Dissertation*.6.
[41] Freire and Macedo, "Literacy: Reading the Word and the World. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers."

One of the main problems in the literature search is a lack of published literature from the middle years of 2010-2015. Many relevant studies fall under the late 2000s with an abundance in the years 2016 moving forward. Data is collected from 54 in-depth reviewed literature. From the 54 online research papers, data was presented in six themes. Namely: (a) standardised testing and rigid curriculums, (b) insufficient teacher theoretical knowledge, (c) difficult to teach to learners, (d) influence of teacher identities and beliefs, (e) influence of learner circumstance, and lastly, (f) influence of context. Moreover, this study has used a sample generalizability technique which refers to "the ability to generalize from the sample to the larger population and rests on the basis that the selected sample is representative of the larger population."[42] This allows the study to act as a representation of the overall practices performed and challenges faced by all teachers of critical literacy and critical visual literacy.

Furthermore, this study employed the thematic analysis which involves "identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data."[43] that relate to teachers' use of the critical literacy pedagogy and the issues thereof. This study has thematised data based on Clark and Hollingsworth's notion that certain factors "influence the changing environment of teachers for professional growth."[44] Among these factors are "the external domain, personal domain, and the contextual domain."[45] The data has been analysed in relation to how teachers' personal, contextual and external factors influence their implementation of critical literacy and critical visual literacy and how (depending on which domain certain factors fall under) they have the ability to change these factors to ensure professional growth by practicing critical literacy.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Standardised Testing and Rigid Curriculum Policies

When asked about the implementation of critical literacy (including visual) in the classroom, teacher participants in reviewed literature by Cho and Rosos et al cited standard-based and test-driven education systems as barriers to these implementations.[46] Both studies indicate that teacher participants who obtained theoretical knowledge of and were aware of critical literacy in the curriculum complained of a conflict to either teach critical literacy or focus on content that will be tested. One teacher participant noted this difficulty by describing that "[he/she] sometimes [feels] as if a lot of [teachers'] creativity in lesson planning is unfortunately squelched by the dictates of [school] standards and time limitations."[47] Moreover, a teacher participant in Rosos's et al study realised that having to choose what to prioritize between critical literacy and other content although both are stated in the curriculum highlights a "disconnection between the curriculum and the list of competencies which were to be tested among students."[48] This is also evident within critical visual literacy where Mbelani, after teaching a critical visual literacy lesson to his students, gave them the task of designing an advertisement "to grant learners an opportunity to demonstrate and apply newly acquired knowledge."[49] With the prescribed rubric, he realised that it was "invalid and unreliable [because] the six criteria listed on it did not match very well with the content learnt."[50] There was, in fact, one criterion out of nine criteria (focusing on stereotypes) that encouraged some form of visual awareness Responses suggest curriculum contradictions, that although included in curriculums, critical literacy, and critical visual literacy are often not tested on.

Teacher participants also bring attention to the limiting nature of rigid school curriculums. Studies indicate limitations of prescribed school curriculums on the implementation of critical literacy by teachers

[42] David Scott and Marlene Morrison, *Key Ideas in Educational Research* (A&C Black, 2005), 219.
[43] Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt, "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars.," *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2017).3352.
[44] David Clarke and Hilary Hollingsworth, "Elaborating a Model of Teacher Professional Growth," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 18, no. 8 (2002): 957.
[45] Clarke and Hollingsworth, "Elaborating a Model of Teacher Professional Growth." 957.
[46] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy"; Rosos et al., "Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers."
[47] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy."71.
[48] Rosos et al., "Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers."306
[49] Madeyandile Mbelani, "Winds of Change in Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practice: A Self-Critical Reflection on the Teaching and Learning of Visual Literacy in a Rural Eastern Cape High School.," *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 7, no. 3 (2008): 106.
[50] Mbelani, "Winds of Change in Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practice: A Self-Critical Reflection on the Teaching and Learning of Visual Literacy in a Rural Eastern Cape High School."106.

in three respects: a) challenges in changing an established education system b) attempts to link curriculum objectives with critical literacy objectives c) the lack of risky topics in the curriculum due to prescribed materials and d) the conflict between postgraduate training programmes for teachers and school policies.

Firstly, for Beck, Leanna and Guttiérrez an established education system brought normality which resulted in comfort for teachers.[51] David, in Guttiérrez's study felt that "there is a system that precedes [teachers] … it's [their] comfort zone, if it's the way it's been done, you get used to it, it's easier, changing is difficult."[52] In Ordem and Ulum's case, one teacher felt he/she "[was] responsible for following the curriculum given by the curriculum office."[53] These responses show that teachers who are comfortable with the curriculum and feel obligated to not question it are highly unlikely to practice critical literacy in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

Secondly, teachers who are aware of rigid school curriculums but still try to teach critical literacy find it difficult to balance critical literacy and the prioritization of core curriculum content. Teacher participant, David, whose views were discussed previously wanted to have a discussion with learners on their different home experiences, but he still wanted them to speak in the correct tense. In his words, "I want them to be able to say, for example, in past perfect, 'When I got back from school, my mom had already prepared my food.'"[54] A second participant from the same study, Carolina also "[tried] to connect the grammar stated by the school curriculum to lessons that actually led her students to reflect."[55] From these responses, teachers who attempt to liaise with rigid school curriculums to invite critical literacy in the classroom are challenged with finding a middle ground.

There is also a link found in the curriculum set content and the materials given to teach it. These materials, according to teacher participants in Leanna, Sardabi, Biria, & Golestan, and Latif's studies pose an issue of challenging power in lessons as they do not incorporate topics that encourage teachers to engage in critical literacy with learners.[56] A teacher in Leanna's study expressed her view that curriculum-prescribed materials do not make it possible to learn about social issues.[57] He said, "[they] are set up in such a way that doesn't allow us to talk about these things [as in social issues like poverty, sexism, racism]."[58] Moreover, Latif's study highlighted that "some international publishers expect language coursebook writers to avoid handling certain literacy topics."[59]

These responses show that if certain topics are omitted from textbooks, they will be omitted from discussions in the classrooms if teachers follow the rigid nature of curriculum expectations. However, what is interesting is when Sardabi et al. asked their teacher participants if they would take the opportunity to design their own teaching materials if given the opportunity, Teacher 8 answered and said "there is no need to design the materials because we have access to many great textbooks that are written by the experts... For preparing the material we should have the expertise."[60] It is apparent that some teachers do consider prescribed textbooks the unquestionable standard.

Lastly, although incredibly scarcely researched, the conflict between teachers trained in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for critical literacy and their inability to practice their knowledge in schools was noted in a few studies. Mendelowitz et al maintained that although constrained

[51] Ann S Beck, "A Place for Critical Literacy," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 48, no. 5 (2005): 392–400; K Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom," *Inter Actions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014) ;Claudia Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons," *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal* 17, no. 2 (2015): 179–92.

[52] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons." 184.

[53] Eser Ordem and Omer Gokhan Ulum, "Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey.," *Critical Questions in Education* 12, no. 2 (2021): 128–42.

[54] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons." 184.

[55] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons." 186.

[56] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom"; Narges Sardabi, Reza Biria, and Ahmad Ameri Golestan, "Reshaping Teacher Professional Identity through Critical Pedagogy-Informed Teacher Education.," *International Journal of Instruction* 11, no. 3 (2018): 617–34; Muhammad M M Abdel Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 115 (2022): 103733.

[57] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom."

[58] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom."

[59] Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."

[60] Sardabi, Biria, and Golestan, "Reshaping Teacher Professional Identity through Critical Pedagogy-Informed Teacher Education."625.

by school language policies, universities still prepare pre-service teachers to teach critical literacy.[61] Nkealah and Simango identified that "while English curricula at university are flexible and allow teacher educators to have some level of academic freedom in choosing their topics and methodologies in teaching, the school system in South Africa is less so since teaching is regulated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement."[62] It is evident that once out of the university context and into the school context, teachers are limited by education policies to practice critical literacy and challenge power.

Insufficient Teacher Theoretical Knowledge

A second common theme across reviewed literature was teachers' lack of understanding of critical literacy. Throughout the reviewed literature, there was a complete unknowing of as well as a misunderstanding of what critical literacy entails. For three teacher participants in Cho's study critical literacy involved "critically analyzing the text, analyzing text by making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connection [and critical literacy] would be strongly related to critical thinking."[63] This is also seen in Gin's study where a questionnaire revealed that all teacher participants confused critical literacy with critical thinking.[64] Away from the idea of critical thinking, Teacher 2 in Boakye et al's study responded to the question of what critical literacy is as "the literacy levels of the learners."[65] When it comes to critical visual literacy, while a lack of knowledge was also a problem, a bigger problem was teachers eliminating visuals as a form of literacy. This is because of a wide belief that literacy is centered around "print-based-text". There is a clear indication in the results of not only a complete lack of knowledge of critical literacy but there is also a recurring theme of the misconception that critical literacy is or is similar to critical thinking and a culture of revoking critical visual literacy its right to be considered "literacy".

Some respondents believe that their lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of critical literacy is because of its absence in their higher education studies. A pattern emerged where teachers who were knowledgeable about critical literacy either had an Honours, Masters, or Doctoral degree in English education. Lea, in Gin supports the idea that critical pedagogy is honed in postgraduate causes because she "attended undergraduate study in which the program did not provide any training related to developing critical English classroom."[66] Moreover, out of the ten English teachers present in Rosos et al's study, only two Master's degree holders knew what critical literacy was.[67] For Mahmoodarabi and Khodabakhsh's quantitative study, teachers with PhD showed a slightly higher awareness of critical literacy than those with BAs and MAs.[68] These results show that only a select few – particularly those with postgraduate degrees – have the knowledge to engage in critical literacy and challenge power in the classroom.

Considered Difficult to Teach to Learners

Teachers showed an unwillingness to teach critical literacy in their classes because they had the opinion that young learners, learners with a lower IQ and learners struggling with speaking English will not understand critical literacy. One interviewed teacher in Latif's study indicated that "the general atmosphere and the students' awareness levels and language skills make [him/her] unable to practice to teach such issues [for social change]."[69] David, from Guttiérrez's and Nadine, from Gin's study each

[61] Belinda Mendelowitz, Ana Ferreira, and Kerryn Dixon, *Language Narratives and Shifting Multilingual Pedagogies: English Teaching from the South* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).
[62] Nkealah and Simango, "Using Critical Pedagogy in English Education: Disjunctures between Pre-Service Teachers' Preparation and Opportunities for Implementation."70.
[63] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!'..." 73.
[64] Gustine, "A Survey on Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Approach to Teaching English in Indonesia."
[65] Boakye, Olifant, and Cekiso, "Investigating Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Literacy: A Case Study from Two South African Township Schools." 60.
[66] Gustine, "A Survey on Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Approach to Teaching English in Indonesia." 534.
[67] Rosos et al., "Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers."
[68] Mahsa Mahmoodarabi and Mohammad Reza Khodabakhsh, "Critical Pedagogy: EFL Teachers' Views, Experience and Academic Degrees.," *English Language Teaching* 8, no. 6 (2015): 100–110.
[69] Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."4.

believed that critical literacy was way too advanced for certain learners.[70] One pre-service teacher in Lee's study went as far as saying "[he/she] only chose to do [her] invitation with high ability students … The four students that ended up working on this invitation were picked … based on grades …"[71] These results show that teachers link high grades with the ability to engage in critical literacy.

Influence of Teacher Identities and Beliefs on Classroom Instruction

Another area of concern highlighted in literature regarding the implementation of critical literacy by teachers in the classroom is the issue of teachers' identities and beliefs. According to research, teachers' lived experiences which form part of their identities and their knowledge which influence their beliefs also have a direct impact on their classroom practices. In Winney's study teacher participant Bill led a discussion in the classroom because he wanted his more privileged learners to see how lucky they were to be in a good school because he [the teacher] believed they were.[72] In Latif's study, a teacher participant stated that he/she "[tries] ideological deviation … to correct [students'] ideas."[73] Two teachers in Cho's study saw the fallacy in teachers like Bill's actions with one teacher stating that "teachers need to be very careful not to let their own views influence their questions."[74] and the other supported by expressing that "[his/her] classroom cannot be a soapbox for [his/her] set of values no matter how passionate [he/she] feels about something". Teacher C from Leanna's study believes that "students don't have the expertise yet. They're 16, they're 14, and their source is the Internet"[75] and because of that, the teacher does not see them fit to make reliable contributions to discussions.

An incredibly explicit example is that of a teacher in Lloyd's study, where her identity as a Zulu woman living in the rural areas growing up with certain gender beliefs presented themselves detrimental to critical literacy in an English First Additional Language classroom when reading on issues of gender. In a short story, the main character has a conversation with a co-worker about going out to lunch with a "city" boy:

> "Teacher:[reading] 'She told me it was wise not to sleep with him because then I could dump him any time I wanted to. I was very nervous about such things.' [Teacher commenting]: 'Why she was nervous? It's because she was coming from upcountry.' [Teacher reading]: 'In city life I thought it was better to be a bari (fool) than to be stabbed by a city boy for his money.'
> Learners:'Yes!'
> Female Learner: 'Unyanisile.' [She's right.]."[76]

Here, Lloyd concludes that the beliefs of the teacher that rural girls are not safe when going out with city boys and in this case should be nervous and not fight back is a result of her "past [being] with [her]; [and] the experiences of black women [being] their experiences."[77] These responses show that teachers' lived experiences influence their identities which in turn influence their beliefs about practicing critical pedagogy.

Influence of Learner Circumstances

The circumstances surrounding learners were also a recurring subject matter in the literature reviewed. Many teachers complain about learners' responses to certain topics; learners question the importance of critical literacy and backlash from parents. Ordemand Ulum and Latif identify a pattern of teachers' fear of teaching critical literacy due to the uncertainty of learner's reactions toward certain topics.[78] Two

[70] Gustine, "A Survey on Critical Literacy as a Pedagogical Approach to Teaching English in Indonesia."; Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons."
[71] Lee, "Myths about Critical Literacy: What Teachers Need to Unlearn."98.
[72] Winney, "Junior Teachers' Perspectives of Critical Literacy."
[73] Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."5.
[74] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy."74.
[75] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom."11.
[76] Glynis Lloyd, "Are We Teaching Critical Literacy? Reading Practices in a Township Classroom," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 7, no. 1 (2016): 5.
[77] Lloyd, "Are We Teaching Critical Literacy? Reading Practices in a Township Classroom." 5.
[78] Ordem and Ulum, "Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey."; Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."

teachers in Latif's study highlighted how debates on controversial topics "can cause controversy and disagreement inside and outside the class" with the second teacher participant adding that "different political doctrines or ideologies can easily cause differences among students." These results show that in avoidance of these disagreements, teachers may opt to limit or completely scratch critical literacy practices in their classroom.[79]

Teacher G in Leanna's study noted that aware of curriculum expectations, many of his/her learners tended to ask questions like "Why are we learning this?" during attempts of reformative discussions.[80] Teacher participants in this study together with that of Allen and Rossatto noticed the difficulty of teaching privileged learners.[81] Allen and Rossatto were met with resistance when trying to engage White students in critical pedagogy to a point where they asked themselves, "Are there limits to critical pedagogy? Is there some other discourse or pedagogy that can make more progress in transforming White consciousness and forming alliances among both oppressor and oppressed?"[82] Teacher D in Leanna also inspected his privileged classroom and asked himself if his learners had the "fire in their bellies to engage with critical questions."[83] As noted above, teachers do not know how to engage privileged learners to be aware of their privilege.

The challenge posed by learners' circumstances in employing critical literacy in the classroom is the criticism by parents. Three teacher participants in Cho's study revealed the following: the first teacher "[believed] the biggest drawback to critical literacy is the potential for conflict with 'at-home-values'"[84], the second teacher stated that a balance needs to be created in "a critical learning environment without the consequences of conflicting with parents" and the last teacher participant confessed that he/she was "hesitant to bring up real-world issues because of the fear of parental disapproval."[85] Conflict with at-home-values is also highlighted by teacher, David in Guttiérrez's study where he had challenges discussing issues on sexual identity because "parents [may] come to [them] and complain about the fact that in [his] class their child came to the conclusion that Gay marriage should be allowed in [their] country."[86] In the same study, Carolina also pointed out how the dialogical nature of critical pedagogy may be problematic as "some parents want proofs, they want to see what the students are doing, and sometimes when they have time in classes to just talk, they [parents] might see it as a problem."[87] It is evident that the need for parents to "see" the work that has been done by their children limits teachers' practice of critical literacy.

Influence of Context

In the literature reviewed, teachers also reported the culture and rules of both the schools they teach in and the countries the schools they teach in are based as a challenge to their conducting of critical literacy lessons. In Guttiérrez's study, participant teacher, Camilo, realised the importance of context in conducting critical literacy.[88] Particularly that of a public school context. Camilo explained that "because of the fact that there were about 40 people wanting to say something the noise increased and it caused some discipline difficulties."[89] This result shows how unfavourable large classrooms in public schools can be to the establishment of critical pedagogy.

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[79] Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."
[80] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom."
[81] Ricky Lee Allen and César Augusto Rossatto, "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2009): 163–80.
[82] Allen and Rossatto, "Does Critical Pedagogy Work with Privileged Students?" 164.
[83] Leanna, "Teachers' Reflections on Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom." 14.
[84] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy."72.
[85] Cho, "'I Love This Approach, but Find It Difficult to Jump in with Two Feet!' Teachers' Perceived Challenges of Employing Critical Literacy."72.
[86] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons."
[87] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons."185.
[88] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons."
[89] Gutiérrez, "Beliefs, Attitudes, and Reflections of EFL Pre-Service Teachers While Exploring Critical Literacy Theories to Prepare and Implement Critical Lessons."188.

In schools, teachers tend to have an uncritical voice because of compliance with school regulations. Teachers 3 and 4 in Sardabi et al's study commented on this, with teacher 3 saying that "[they] are not allowed to interfere with the decisions of the supervisor and manager" and teacher 4 similarly explaining that it is important to "[obey] and [follow] the rules of the institute" which often include the nonfulfillment of critical literacy.[90]

This is seen when asked why they never use the critical pedagogy approach in their classrooms, one teacher participant in Ordem and Ulum's study expressed that "[his/her] department, where [he/she works] as an instructor, does not allow [them] to discuss such risky topics" And that "administrators [in their schools] push [them] to follow the curriculum."[91] These responses indicate how the schools in which teachers teach can have certain regulations in place that directly affect their approach to critical pedagogy. In the same study by Ordem and Ulum, a teacher identified how the sociopolitical and cultural climate of Turkey as a country can impact instructional activities in the classroom. "Turkish students are not ready to discuss daily topics such as politics and social issues because we do not have this democratic culture" in the country, expressed one teacher.[92] Another followed to emphasize the risk of speaking about certain topics in the classroom by saying that:

> "At the university, we cannot debate these [risky] topics even with our colleagues … We cannot discuss these issues in Turkey."[93]

In the same depth, in the Egyptian context, "cultural and social considerations in the Egyptian society inhibit them from discussing some types of topics in their CL instructional attempts."[94] For Aliakbari and Allahmoradi's quantitative research it was recorded that in the difference between male and female teachers' views on critical literacy, males presented a higher mean. This, according to Aliakbari and Allahmoradi "relates to the Iranian culture in which men have more freedom and courage in expressing their own personal ideas."[95] From this, one can see that the rule of law of a specific country has a direct influence on a school and what is taught in its classrooms.

Discussion Summary

Research indicates that teachers' backgrounds affect their beliefs which in turn affect their pedagogical styles and opinions when it comes to critical literacy. This is seen where teachers seemed to be unaware of how their own identities can create a negative critical literacy experience for learners. By further researching the challenges faced by teachers when implementing critical literacy, high-stake testing are presented to put teachers under pressure to teach in preparation for assessments for learners to get good grades, leaving no room for topics like critical literacy to be explored. Further, the relationship between higher education institutions and school curriculum developers is questioned where schools require certain training from teachers that are not taught to them in higher education centres. On the contrary, when teachers were trained, it was either not enough training or training done in an unstructured manner which has the potential to be detrimental as this process may produce a critical visual literacy knowledge that is lacking. In all, the research reviewed shows that the employment of critical literacy and critical visual literacy can be affected by both teachers' own intrinsic factors towards it as well as factors far beyond their control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Limited research was available on critical visual literacy particularly. The only novel idea referencing critical visual literacy alone that presented itself is the reductionist approach by teachers to consider visual texts as "just pictures" and nothing to do with the concept of literacy. It begs the question of critical visual literacy's place within critical literacy practices. Is critical visual literacy one of the features of critical literacy that can be studied on its own? Or, is the lack of research on critical visual literacy part of a fallacy

[90] Sardabi, Biria, and Golestan, "Reshaping Teacher Professional Identity through Critical Pedagogy-Informed Teacher Education."624
[91] Ordem and Ulum, "Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey."
[92] Ordem and Ulum, "Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey."133.
[93] Ordem and Ulum, "Critical Pedagogy and Socio-Political Issues in Language Teaching: Views from Turkey."134.
[94] Latif, "EFL Teachers' Critical Literacy Instructional Perspectives and Practices: The Case of the Egyptian University Context."8.
[95] Aliakbari and Allahmoradi, "On Iranian School Teachers' Perceptions of the Principles of Critical Pedagogy."167.

that considers it the same thing as critical literacy? The latter would explain the lack of research on critical visual literacy, while the former encourages it. This calls for a clear distinction before we continue with assumptions that research on critical literacy stands for critical visual literacy.Therefore, it is recommended that future research work towards either creating a distinction between critical visual literacy and visual literacy or explicitly using them interchangeably.

CONCLUSION

Teacher practices of critical literacy in addition to the challenges they face as explored in this study have contributed to an extensive understanding of critical literacy in not only the South African context, but in other countries too. This is especially important, taking into consideration the nature of critical literacy and critical visual literacy to not be linear but to exist differently in the different places it is practiced to challenge issues specific to particular contexts. Imagine a world, with its various contexts, where before our learners accept, they begin by questioning, and by questioning, they begin to undo ideas they thought were completely done. With this comes a generation of learners who respect different perspectives, making them immediately positive towards work on equality which is far beyond beneficial in a country like South Africa that is still bleeding from Aparthied. This makes it important for policymakers to not only be intentional about critical visual literacy in curriculum but for all the internal and external challenges faced by teachers in their attempts to teach critical literacy and critical visual literacy to be explicitly addressed.

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