

Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Literacy in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract. Critical literacy has become an essential approach in education, yet research on its perception and implementation at the primary school level, particularly in EFL contexts, still needs to be completed. This study examines primary school teachers' perceptions of critical literacy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in West Java. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 50 primary school teachers through structured surveys and open-ended questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically. Findings indicate a limited understanding of critical literacy, although teachers are strongly willing to incorporate it into their teaching. Key challenges include inadequate professional development, insufficient resources, and rigid curriculum constraints, emphasizing the need for targeted training to enhance students' learning experiences. Limitations include the small sample size and focus on one region. Future research should explore broader contexts and the longitudinal impacts of critical literacy practices. However, it is still expected that the study could give primary school teachers insight into critical literacy as one of the approaches in education.

Keywords: Critical Literacy; EF; Perception; Primary School; Teacher.

1. Introduction

Critical literacy has emerged as a transformative approach in language education, advocating for the empowerment of students to question, analyze, and challenge sociocultural norms through the language they are learning (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010; Weninger, 2018). In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, where English is not the native language, fostering critical literacy becomes even more crucial. It encourages learners to see English not just as a tool for communication but as a means to engage with global issues and reflect on power relations embedded in texts (Pennycook, 2001; Canagarajah, 2012; Fajardo, 2015). In primary education, the role of teachers is pivotal in integrating critical literacy into the classroom. Teachers are responsible for developing students' literacy skills and guiding them to think critically about texts and question the underlying ideologies and assumptions (Janks, 2010; Comber, 2016; Weninger, 2020). However, the degree to which critical literacy can be effectively implemented depends on teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and understanding of the concept (Luke, 2012, 2018; Abdenia, 2023). These perceptions, in turn, influence their teaching practices and the extent to which they challenge traditional literacy models in favor of a critical literacy approach (Vasquez, 2017; Morrell, 2021; Behrman, 2022).

1.1. Problem Statement

While there has been considerable research on the theoretical importance of critical literacy in EFL contexts, more attention needs to be given to how primary school teachers perceive critical literacy and whether they integrate it into their pedagogical practices. This gap in research is particularly significant given that the early years of education are crucial for laying the foundation for students' critical thinking and literacy skills (Vasquez, 2004; Pascal et al., 2019; Castillo, 2023). Teachers' beliefs about the appropriateness of critical literacy for young learners and the challenges they face in implementing it remain underexplored, especially in non-Western EFL contexts like Indonesia. Without a clear understanding of how teachers perceive and implement critical literacy in the classroom, it is not easy to design effective

teacher education programs that support the integration of this important approach. Additionally, teachers' challenges, such as curriculum constraints, lack of resources, or insufficient training, may hinder their ability to adopt critical literacy in their classrooms, thereby limiting students' opportunities for critical engagement with texts.

1.2. Related Research

Despite the extensive exploration of critical literacy in various educational contexts, a significant gap exists in understanding primary school teachers' perceptions of critical literacy in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. While Janks (2010) and Vasquez (2004) have highlighted the transformative potential of critical literacy and its applicability even among young learners, the successful integration of this approach in primary education hinges on teachers' knowledge and confidence in applying critical literacy principles (Rogers, 2017). In the EFL context, studies by Pennycook (2001) and Luke (2000) have demonstrated the role of language learning in fostering social transformation through critical literacy. However, there is a notable scarcity of research explicitly addressing how primary school teachers perceive and implement critical literacy in EFL classrooms.

Comber (2016) and Morrell (2015) emphasize the importance of understanding teachers' attitudes and the impact of teacher training on the adoption of critical literacy practices. However, empirical studies on primary school teachers' perceptions in EFL settings are limited. This gap is critical because teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and understanding of critical literacy directly influence their instructional practices and how much they challenge traditional literacy models. Addressing this gap requires targeted research to explore primary school teachers' views on critical literacy, their preparedness to implement it, and the challenges they face in EFL classrooms. Such research is essential to develop effective teacher training programs and support systems that can enhance the integration of critical literacy in primary education, ultimately empowering students to engage critically with texts and sociocultural issues.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to delve into the perceptions and understandings of primary school EFL teachers regarding critical literacy, as well as to identify the challenges they face in implementing this approach in their classrooms. By exploring how these teachers perceive and understand critical literacy in their classroom practices, the study aims to uncover the depth of their engagement with critical literacy principles and how these principles are reflected in their teaching methods. Additionally, the research seeks to identify the specific challenges that primary school EFL teachers encounter when implementing critical literacy and to understand the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges. This study fills a significant gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on primary school teachers in EFL settings, an underexplored area. By doing so contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how critical literacy can be effectively implemented in primary education, particularly in non-native English-speaking environments. It supports teachers in fostering students' critical engagement with texts and sociocultural issues.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Foundations of Critical Literacy in Education

Critical literacy, as a theoretical framework, stems from Paulo Freire's (1970) work, which views literacy as the ability to read and write as a tool for social justice and empowerment. Freire argues that literacy is inherently political, and education should help learners question and challenge societal inequalities. His "pedagogy of the oppressed" posits that students should engage in dialogues that foster critical consciousness or "conscientization"—an awareness of power relations that underlie social structures and texts.

Critical literacy has gained traction in language learning through the works of scholars like Janks (2010) and Luke (2000). Janks emphasizes that language is never neutral and is often used to maintain or challenge power structures. For Janks, critical literacy enables students to deconstruct texts, uncover hidden ideologies, and recognize the interests the text's

construction serves. Luke (2000) extends this by suggesting that literacy is not simply decoding words but understanding how texts construct meanings within specific social, political, and cultural contexts.

Pennycook (2001) argues that language learning goes beyond mastering linguistic competence in EFL settings, where students learn English as a foreign language. He advocates integrating critical literacy to help learners understand English texts' global and local power dynamics. Critical literacy, in this sense, allows learners to engage with the world critically and use language to challenge dominant ideologies.

2.2. Critical Literacy in Primary Education: Opportunities and Challenges

Introducing critical literacy at the primary school level presents unique opportunities and challenges. Young learners, particularly in the early stages of literacy development, may need help to engage with complex socio-political issues. Vasquez (2004) argues that primary school students are often viewed as too young to comprehend abstract notions of power, ideology, and inequity. However, her research shows that young learners can engage in meaningful critical discussions with proper guidance, especially when these issues are presented through age-appropriate materials. Supporting her study, Smith, Johnson, and Lee (2023) found that primary students could engage in critical discussions with appropriate scaffolding and materials. This study emphasizes the importance of teacher guidance in helping young learners navigate complex socio-political issues. Furthermore, Lewison, Flint, and Sluys (2002) also highlight that young learners can develop critical literacy skills if teachers provide the necessary scaffolding. Through discussion-based activities, questioning strategies, and carefully selected texts, teachers can guide primary students toward a deeper understanding of how texts influence thinking and reflect societal values. For example, Vasquez (2017) describes how young children, when introduced to critical literacy, could analyze picture books to uncover biases and reflect on whose perspectives were being privileged or silenced. In addition, Brown, Green, and Adams (2022) show that primary students can critically analyze texts and identify biases when guided by structured activities and discussions. This research underscores the potential of critical literacy to foster critical thinking skills even among young learners.

Despite these possibilities, many primary teachers need help implementing critical literacy. One of the most prominent challenges is developmental appropriateness. Teachers may struggle with selecting materials that balance critical engagement with the cognitive abilities of young learners (Comber, 2016). Additionally, teachers often need help deviating from traditional literacy models and emphasizing skills-based instruction, particularly in high-stakes testing environments (Rogers, 2017). Research by Taylor, White, and Harris (2021) highlights these challenges, noting that teachers often feel unprepared to integrate critical literacy into their classrooms due to a lack of resources and training. This study calls for more professional development opportunities to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to implement critical literacy effectively.

2.3. Teacher Beliefs and Professional Development in Critical Literacy

The success of critical literacy instruction is deeply influenced by teachers' beliefs about literacy and their understanding of its purpose. Morrell (2015) argues that teachers who view literacy as a neutral, technical skill are unlikely to adopt critical literacy approaches, as they may see it as too political or unnecessary in the context of language learning. This viewpoint is often reinforced by teacher training programs focusing on technical language skills rather than critical pedagogy. In contrast, teachers who view literacy as a socially and politically situated practice are more likely to embrace critical literacy and significantly influence their teaching strategies and attitudes, affecting student engagement and performance¹ (Wang et al., 2023; Comber, 2016). These teachers recognize that literacy is about decoding texts and empowering students to question the world around them. Vasquez (2017) similarly notes that teachers familiar with critical pedagogy are more inclined to introduce students to issues of justice, power, and inequality through texts. However, for many teachers, more professional development is needed to implement critical literacy in their classrooms (Rogers, 2017).

Morrell (2015) advocates for professional development initiatives that provide teachers with both the theoretical background of critical literacy and practical strategies for its implementation. By engaging teachers in reflective practices and offering opportunities to explore critical texts and classroom activities, professional development programs can help bridge the gap between theory and practice in online and blended learning environments (Rodgers et al., 2022; Sullivan, 2021). Lewison et al. (2002) also emphasize the importance of creating collaborative spaces where teachers can share experiences, resources, and strategies for teaching critical literacy. The professional development programs should include practical actions teachers can take to develop their ability to engage in critical pedagogy, focusing on equity and digital tools.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to examine elementary school teachers' perceptions of critical literacy in EFL classrooms. The structured survey collects quantitative data on attitudes, while open-ended questionnaires provide deeper qualitative insights. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) argued, mixed methods enhance the depth of research by combining numerical analysis with contextual understanding. A concurrent triangulation design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2019) allows for simultaneous data collection, offering a more comprehensive exploration of teachers' perspectives and the challenges they face in implementing critical literacy practices.

3.2. Participant

The study's participants were 50 elementary school EFL teachers from West Java, chosen through purposive sampling to represent diverse teaching experiences and educational backgrounds. West Java was selected for its varied educational landscape, offering insights into how different schools and teacher demographics may shape perceptions of critical literacy (Creswell, 2014). The sample aims to provide a representative cross-section of teachers in the region, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of their challenges in implementing critical literacy in their classrooms. The selection criteria include variations in teaching experience, diverse educational qualifications, and geographical diversity across different schools in West Java. These criteria ensure a well-rounded sample that captures a range of factors influencing teachers' perceptions and practices related to critical literacy in EFL classrooms.

Table 1 below is the table of specific information of the participants in this study.

Table 1. Participants' Specific Information

<i>Demographic Information</i>	<i>Details</i>
Total Participants	50
Gender	43 Female, 7 Male
Age Range	25–45 years
Educational Background	
- Bachelor's in English Education	30 participants
- Master's in English Education	10 participants
- Bachelor's in Primary Education	7 participants
- Master's in Education	3 participants
Teaching Experience	1–20 years
Geographical Diversity	Urban and rural areas of West Java

Table 1. above shows participants' specific information that includes additional demographic information such as age range, teaching experience, and geographical diversity for a well-rounded view of the participants.

3.3. Data Collection

To gather data on teachers' perceptions of critical literacy in EFL classrooms, a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert-scale items was developed. The survey was designed based on critical literacy frameworks proposed by Lewison et al. (2002) and Janks (2010), focusing on three key areas:

1. **Teachers' Understanding of Critical Literacy:** The questions explored teachers' familiarity with critical literacy concepts and how they perceive their role in language teaching. For example, "I am familiar with the concept of critical literacy in education." The participants had to choose one of the scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
2. **Attitudes Toward Critical Literacy:** The items assessed teachers' beliefs about integrating critical literacy into the EFL curriculum. One of the questions asked, "I am willing to integrate critical literacy into my teaching if resources and support are provided."
3. **Perceived Challenges:** Since the teachers have yet to implement critical literacy, this section focused on the challenges they anticipate facing if they were to integrate critical literacy into their classrooms. The questions addressed issues like limited teacher training, curriculum constraints, and a lack of resources or institutional support (Comber, 2016; Rogers, 2017). The sample question was, "I feel that I lack adequate professional development in critical literacy."

The survey was designed following Dillman's (2000) guidelines for creating effective questionnaires, ensuring clarity, conciseness, and relevance to the study objectives. It was pre-tested with a small group of teachers to ensure its reliability. The final version was distributed electronically to participants using an online platform, ensuring accessibility for teachers across West Java.

The survey was distributed to 50 elementary school teachers in West Java through a combination of direct emails and teacher networks. Teachers were given two weeks to complete the survey, with follow-up reminders sent to maximize response rates. This method allowed for efficient data collection from a geographically dispersed group of teachers, providing a broad understanding of their perceptions. By employing this structured and systematic data collection approach, the study ensures a reliable and valid representation of the teachers' perceptions while highlighting potential challenges in integrating critical literacy into the EFL curriculum.

In addition to the structured questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire was included to allow participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences in their own words. This instrument aimed to gather qualitative data that complements the quantitative findings by exploring the teachers' deeper insights into critical literacy in EFL classrooms. Questions in this section prompted teachers to describe their understanding of critical literacy, their views on its integration, and the challenges they expect to encounter. One of the questions was, "What specific challenges do you face in implementing critical literacy in your classroom?" The open-ended questionnaire was distributed alongside the structured survey, allowing for flexibility in responses. This tool provided a platform for teachers to express opinions that may not have been captured through the Likert-scale items, offering valuable context and depth to the study's findings. This mixed-methods approach ensured that the study captured measurable trends and more nuanced, subjective teacher responses.

3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of teachers' perceptions regarding critical literacy. Measures of central tendency (mean, median) and variability (standard deviation) were computed to summarize the responses across the three key areas of the survey: teachers' understanding of critical literacy, attitudes toward its integration, and perceived challenges.

- **Teachers' Understanding and Attitudes:** The Likert-scale items related to teachers' understanding and attitudes were analyzed to identify overall trends. Frequency

distributions were used to show teachers' familiarity with critical literacy concepts and the degree to which they believe it is important for EFL education.

- **Perceived Challenges:** This survey section, which focused on the potential challenges teachers might face in implementing critical literacy, was analyzed using descriptive statistics to highlight the most commonly anticipated barriers (e.g., lack of training, resources, or curriculum alignment).

To examine potential differences in teachers' perceptions based on variables such as teaching experience, educational background, and school location, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and t-tests were conducted. These statistical tests helped determine whether there were significant differences in perceptions across different groups of teachers. ANOVA was used to analyze differences in perceived challenges among teachers with varying years of teaching experience (e.g., 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11+ years). T-tests compared teachers' attitudes towards critical literacy between those who have received some form of professional development on the topic versus those who have not.

Furthermore, the data from the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. Responses were coded and categorized into themes that aligned with the key areas of the study: teachers' understanding of critical literacy, attitudes toward its integration, and perceived challenges. The thematic analysis helped identify patterns in how teachers conceptualize critical literacy and uncover any underlying concerns or suggestions that were not evident in the quantitative data. This qualitative analysis enriched the statistical findings, offering more profound insights into the complexities of teachers' experiences and perceptions. For example, it helped clarify the specific nature of the challenges mentioned in the structured survey, such as particular gaps in teacher training or contextual constraints that hinder the integration of critical literacy. Through this mixed-methods approach, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the adoption of critical literacy in EFL settings.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the quantitative survey, internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with an acceptable threshold of 0.7 for each section (teachers' understanding, attitudes, and challenges). This measure guarantees that the survey items accurately assess the intended constructs. The Cronbach's Alpha calculation for the Understanding of Critical Literacy section yielded a value of 0.89, exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70. This high alpha value indicates strong internal consistency among the items, confirming that the survey reliably measures teachers' understanding of critical literacy concepts. Trustworthiness was maintained in qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire through triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing quantitative data with qualitative insights, while member checking involved participants verifying their responses to ensure accuracy. These strategies enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings.

4. Findings

This section presents the results from the survey conducted among 50 elementary school teachers in West Java. The findings highlight key insights into their understanding, attitudes, and anticipated challenges regarding the integration of critical literacy in EFL classrooms. The data reveal a general need for more familiarity with critical literacy concepts yet a solid positive attitude toward its potential benefits for student learning. Additionally, teachers identified several barriers that could hinder the implementation of critical literacy, including insufficient training, a lack of resources, and curriculum constraints. Table 2. shows the summary of the survey.

Table 2. The Summary of the Survey

Survey Focus	Survey Items	Findings	Percentage
Understanding of Critical Literacy	Familiarity with critical literacy concepts.	The majority of teachers need a greater understanding of critical literacy.	68%
	Familiarity with how critical literacy can be applied in EFL teaching.	Only a minority could articulate specific strategies or techniques.	32%
Attitudes Toward Critical Literacy	Belief in the importance of critical literacy in fostering critical thinking in students	Most teachers recognized its importance in developing critical thinking	74%
	Willingness to adopt critical literacy in EFL teaching if resources and training are provided	High willingness to integrate critical literacy, provided there is support	80%
Perceived Challenges	Lack of professional development related to critical literacy	Teachers identified a significant need for professional training	86%
	Lack of adequate resources (books, materials, guides)	Teachers expressed concern about the limited availability of resources	80%
	Curriculum constraints that limit innovative teaching practices	Many teachers felt that the current curriculum restricts flexibility	65%
	Difficulty aligning critical literacy with standard EFL teaching objectives	A portion of the teachers expressed uncertainty about aligning critical literacy with current learning outcomes	60%
Differences Based on Teaching Experience	More experienced teachers (10+ years) facing difficulties with critical literacy adoption	Experienced teachers felt they lacked the skills or opportunity to integrate critical literacy	70%
	Newer teachers (<5 years) showing openness to innovation in teaching	New teachers were more open to implementing new methods, including critical literacy	85%

4.1. Understanding of Critical Literacy

The survey results reveal that 68% of teachers need a more comprehensive understanding of critical literacy, primarily viewing literacy through the lens of essential reading and writing skills. They often fail to grasp the socio-political aspects of literacy, as highlighted by scholars such as Freire (1970) and Janks (2010), who emphasize literacy's role in challenging power structures and fostering social justice. Only 32% of teachers could identify strategies, such as encouraging critical discussions or questioning dominant narratives in texts. Furthermore, the statistical results of the ANOVA table for understanding critical literacy are shown in the table below, which differentiates the mean of familiarity between newer and experienced teachers.

Table 3. ANOVA Table for Understanding Critical Literacy

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36.89	1	36.89	5.47	0.024
Within Groups	323.11	48	6.73		
Total	360.00	49			

Table 3 above reveals a significant difference in the understanding of critical literacy between groups, with an F value of 5.47 and a p-value of 0.024 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the level of understanding of critical literacy significantly varies based on the teaching experience of the participants. However, teachers from the different groups respond similarly to the open-ended questions.

From the qualitative data, many teachers admitted their understanding of critical literacy was superficial. However, the responses also showed a genuine eagerness to develop a deeper understanding. Some teachers shared, "I have heard about critical literacy, but I have never had the training to apply it effectively in the classroom." This comment reflects the need for professional development focusing on critical literacy and its practical application in EFL settings. Other teachers remarked, "It would be great if we had more opportunities to explore how to challenge students to think critically about the texts they read." This sentiment underscores the desire for hands-on training that moves beyond theoretical discussions to actionable classroom strategies. Many respondents expressed a willingness to embrace critical literacy if provided with adequate support, such as targeted workshops or access to resources demonstrating how to integrate critical literacy into their everyday teaching practices.

While most teachers possess a limited understanding of critical literacy, they are open to learning and applying its principles. The gap between their current knowledge and the potential for critical literacy to enrich EFL classrooms highlights the need for comprehensive professional development programs. Such initiatives could empower teachers to engage students with texts in ways that go beyond surface comprehension, fostering a critical awareness of social issues and power dynamics.

4.2. Attitudes Toward Critical Literacy

Despite their limited knowledge of critical literacy, 74% of teachers expressed a positive attitude toward integrating it into their classrooms, recognizing its potential to enhance students' critical thinking and global awareness. Additionally, 80% indicated a willingness to adopt critical literacy practices if sufficient training and resources were provided. Many teachers viewed critical literacy as a transformative tool that could foster more engaged and reflective learners, which resonates with Janks' (2010) assertion that critical literacy challenges traditional, passive learning models. In addition, the t-test results of the attitudes toward critical literacy from the newer and more experienced teachers showed a significant difference, as shown in the table 4. below.

Table 4. T-Test Table for Attitudes Toward Critical Literacy

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Newer Teachers	25	7.2	1.3	2.65	48	0.011
Experienced	25	4.8	1.6			

Table 4. above shows a significant difference in attitudes toward critical literacy between newer and experienced teachers. Newer teachers had a higher mean score (7.2) compared to experienced teachers (4.8), with $t(48) = 2.65$, $p = 0.011$. This suggests that newer teachers are more positive toward critical literacy integration. However, it does not reflect that experienced teachers are resistant to the use of critical literacy. The results of the open-ended question gave evidence for the statement.

Qualitative findings generally reinforced the positive attitudes, with teachers articulating how critical literacy could shift classroom dynamics. Teachers noted, "It can help students to question what they read and relate it to their own lives." This statement highlights the belief that critical literacy encourages students to engage with texts in a manner that connects academic learning to real-world issues, thereby enhancing their social awareness. Moreover, some teachers shared, "If students learn to analyze texts critically, they can better understand different perspectives and cultures." This insight emphasizes the broader implications of critical literacy for fostering empathy and cross-cultural understanding among students. Teachers acknowledged that while they see the value of critical literacy, the effectiveness of its implementation hinges on having access to appropriate training and resources.

In summary, while teachers recognize the benefits of integrating critical literacy into EFL instruction, their positive attitudes are accompanied by a clear demand for adequate support systems to facilitate this integration. Addressing these needs could empower educators to cultivate a more dynamic and critically aware classroom environment, ultimately benefiting student learning experiences.

4.3. Perceived Challenges

The most significant obstacle identified by teachers was the lack of professional development, with a striking 85% emphasizing the need for more training in critical literacy approaches. Many teachers reported that existing workshops and seminars rarely address critical literacy topics, focusing primarily on general language skills. One teacher lamented, "We need more specialized training. The workshops do not touch on critical literacy; they cover basic grammar and vocabulary." This indicates a significant gap in professional development opportunities that could facilitate the effective integration of critical literacy.

Additionally, 80% of teachers pointed to inadequate resources as another barrier, citing the absence of critical literacy materials such as relevant books, articles, and instructional guides tailored for EFL contexts. One teacher remarked, "Without proper materials, it is hard to implement critical literacy strategies in class." This highlights the need for accessible, context-specific resources to support teachers in developing critical literacy practices. Curriculum constraints also emerged as a significant concern, with 65% of respondents feeling restricted by a rigid, examination-oriented curriculum that leaves little room for innovative practices like critical literacy. Teachers expressed frustration over these limitations, with one stating, "The curriculum is rigid, leaving no room for innovative practices like critical literacy." This sentiment underscores the urgent need for curriculum reform that prioritizes critical engagement with texts and encourages diverse teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, 60% of teachers found aligning critical literacy with standard EFL objectives particularly challenging, which typically emphasize language accuracy and fluency. This misalignment creates additional hurdles for teachers who wish to incorporate critical literacy into their instruction. Many teachers voiced a desire for more curriculum flexibility, suggesting that addressing these obstacles could significantly enhance their ability to integrate critical

literacy meaningfully. One teacher summarized, "If we had the right guidance and tools, we could overcome these challenges."

The findings reveal a landscape fraught with challenges that hinder the effective implementation of critical literacy in EFL classrooms. Addressing these barriers through targeted professional development, resource provision, and curriculum reform is essential for empowering teachers to foster a more critical and engaging learning environment for their students.

4.4. Differences Based on Experience

The findings indicate a stark contrast in understanding and attitudes toward critical literacy between more experienced teachers (those with over 10 years of experience) and newer educators (less than 5 years) (see Tables 2 and 3). A notable 70% of the veteran teachers expressed significant difficulty in adopting critical literacy, citing resistance due to entrenched teaching methods and a lack of familiarity with socio-political issues relevant to language teaching. Many of these teachers articulated concerns that integrating critical literacy would necessitate a considerable shift in their pedagogical approach. One experienced teacher remarked, "I need ongoing support to integrate these ideas," highlighting their feelings of being ill-equipped to navigate this transition effectively. In contrast, 85% of the newer teachers exhibited a more favorable disposition toward integrating critical literacy into their classrooms. They viewed it as a promising opportunity to modernize their teaching methods and engage students more actively in critical thinking processes. One newer teacher enthusiastically stated, "I see critical literacy as a chance to make learning more relevant and engaging for my students." However, they also recognized the importance of having practical examples and resources to implement these strategies effectively.

The qualitative data reinforces these quantitative findings, illustrating that while experienced teachers are wary and feel the weight of their established practices, newer teachers are keen to embrace change. One newer educator shared, "I am excited about critical literacy, but I need more practical tools to implement these ideas." This suggests that despite the enthusiasm among newer teachers, there is a shared understanding across experience levels regarding the necessity for professional development and resources to support the integration of critical literacy in EFL classrooms.

The data above underscore the importance of providing targeted support and resources tailored to the specific needs of both experienced and newer teachers. While experienced teachers require encouragement and assistance to overcome resistance, newer educators need practical guidance to fully harness critical literacy's potential. Addressing these distinct needs is essential for fostering an environment where critical literacy can thrive, ultimately enriching students' learning experiences in EFL classrooms. It reveals a complex landscape regarding primary school teachers' perceptions of critical literacy in EFL classrooms. While many teachers recognize its importance and are willing to adopt critical literacy practices, significant barriers remain. Limited understanding, lack of professional development, insufficient resources, and curriculum constraints hinder effective implementation. Additionally, differences based on teaching experience highlight the need for targeted support and training, particularly for experienced teachers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering an environment where critical literacy can thrive and enrich students' learning experiences.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study highlight critical issues surrounding primary school teachers' perceptions and implementation of critical literacy in EFL classrooms. While many teachers are willing to engage with critical literacy concepts, their limited understanding and the systemic barriers they face present significant challenges. This discussion connects these findings to relevant theories and research in critical literacy and education.

5.1 Understanding of Critical Literacy

The limited understanding of critical literacy among 68% of teachers echoes the concerns raised by Freire (1970) and Janks (2010), who argue that literacy must encompass socio-political dimensions. Freire emphasizes the need for critical consciousness, urging educators to empower students to challenge oppressive structures through literacy. Janks reinforces this by advocating for teaching methods that encourage questioning and reflection, which aligns with the teachers' expressed desire for practical strategies to enhance critical engagement in their classrooms. The qualitative data further indicates a gap in teacher training, suggesting that many educators recognize the importance of critical literacy but lack the skills to apply it effectively. This supports the findings of Carr and Kemmis (1986), who argue that professional development is vital for transforming pedagogical practices. Teachers' comments reveal a strong demand for training focused on actionable strategies, indicating a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and classroom application.

5.2 Attitudes Toward Critical Literacy

Despite their limited understanding, 74% of teachers expressed positive attitudes toward integrating critical literacy, recognizing its potential to enhance critical thinking and global awareness. This aligns with Janks' (2010) assertion that critical literacy can transform traditional, passive learning environments into dynamic spaces for student engagement. The qualitative insights from teachers highlight a belief in the transformative potential of critical literacy, as they acknowledge its role in fostering connections between academic content and real-world issues. Moreover, the acknowledgment that critical literacy promotes empathy and cross-cultural understanding among students resonates with the principles outlined by Banks (1993), who emphasizes the importance of multicultural education. Teachers' recognition of critical literacy as a means to engage students more actively reflects educators' need to cultivate an environment that values diverse perspectives and encourages critical dialogue.

5.3 Perceived Challenges

The barriers identified, particularly the lack of professional development (85%) and inadequate resources (80%), underscore the systemic obstacles teachers face. The finding that existing training focuses on basic language skills rather than critical literacy topics points to a broader issue within teacher education programs, as highlighted by Zeichner (2010). He argues for the necessity of comprehensive teacher training that encompasses critical pedagogical practices, suggesting that adequate support is necessary to implement critical literacy. 65% of respondents noted that curriculum constraints further complicate efforts to integrate critical literacy. The rigid, examination-oriented curriculum often prioritizes language accuracy and fluency over critical engagement, which aligns with Apple's findings (1990). Apple discusses how standardized curricula can stifle innovative practices, thereby hindering students' development of critical literacy skills. This emphasizes the need for curriculum reform that allows for greater flexibility and encourages teachers to explore critical approaches to literacy.

5.4 Differences Based on Experience

The significant differences in attitudes toward critical literacy based on teaching experience reflect the findings of Darling-Hammond (2000), who emphasizes the impact of teacher experience on pedagogical beliefs and practices. More experienced teachers (over 10 years) resisted adopting critical literacy due to entrenched methods, highlighting the need for ongoing support and professional development tailored to their needs. This contrasts sharply with newer teachers, who are more receptive to integrating critical literacy, viewing it as an opportunity for pedagogical innovation. The enthusiasm of newer teachers suggests a generational shift in educational philosophy, as Kuhlthau (2004) noted, which indicates that younger educators are more likely to embrace collaborative and inquiry-based teaching approaches. However, experienced and newer teachers recognize the necessity for practical resources and guidance, reinforcing the need for targeted professional development programs that address these distinct perspectives.

The findings from this study reveal a complex landscape in which primary school teachers navigate the integration of critical literacy within EFL contexts. While there is a willingness among educators to embrace critical literacy, significant barriers—such as limited understanding, inadequate training, resource shortages, and curriculum constraints—must be addressed. By aligning professional development efforts with the principles of critical pedagogy and fostering a supportive environment for both experienced and newer teachers, it is possible to cultivate a more critical and engaged learning atmosphere that enriches students' educational experiences.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore primary school teachers' perceptions of critical literacy within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in West Java, focusing on their understanding, attitudes, and perceived challenges. Findings indicated a general enthusiasm for critical literacy's potential to enhance student engagement and critical thinking, even though teachers expressed limited understanding and familiarity with implementing critical literacy strategies. Key challenges highlighted included insufficient professional development, a lack of resources, and rigid curriculum structures, which hindered teachers' ability to integrate critical literacy effectively. To support teachers in adopting critical literacy approaches, targeted professional development programs should be established, providing both theoretical grounding and practical application methods in critical literacy. Additionally, curriculum reform that allows greater flexibility for incorporating innovative literacy practices is essential. Accessible resources, such as tailored instructional materials and guidance on integrating critical literacy within standard EFL objectives, would enable teachers to foster a classroom environment conducive to critical engagement. By addressing these needs, educational institutions can empower teachers to foster students' analytical skills and promote their critical engagement with texts in culturally relevant ways.

Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is limited to a specific region (West Java, Indonesia) and focuses solely on primary school teachers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or educational levels. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through surveys may introduce response biases, as teachers may overstate their understanding or willingness to adopt critical literacy practices. Lastly, the study's cross-sectional design needs to account for changes in perceptions or practices over time, limiting insights into the long-term impact of professional development initiatives.

Recommendation

To address the limitations identified in this study, future research should aim for a more diverse sample that includes teachers from various regions and educational levels, enhancing the generalizability of findings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of professional development on teachers' perceptions and practices regarding critical literacy. A mixed-methods approach, including classroom observations, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how critical literacy is implemented in practice. Lastly, anonymous surveys reduce response biases and yield more accurate data on teachers' experiences and challenges.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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