

## **EMPOWERING MINDS: THE ROLE OF TEACHER QUESTIONING IN PROMOTING CRITICAL LITERACY IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the pivotal role that teacher discourse plays in shaping students' critical engagement with texts. Within this context, this study investigates how teacher questioning strategies foster critical literacy in language classrooms. Through analysis of theoretical frameworks and empirical research, the study examines the effectiveness of various questioning techniques in developing students' critical thinking abilities. The findings demonstrate that structured questioning frameworks, particularly those incorporating higher-order thinking skills, enhance students' analytical capabilities and text engagement. Additionally, culturally responsive questioning approaches create more inclusive learning environments and empower marginalized voices. These insights inform recommendations for teacher training programs and classroom practices to promote critical literacy through effective questioning strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Literacy, Teacher Questioning, Language Education, Critical Thinking, Pedagogical Strategy, Student Engagement*

### **INTRODUCTION**

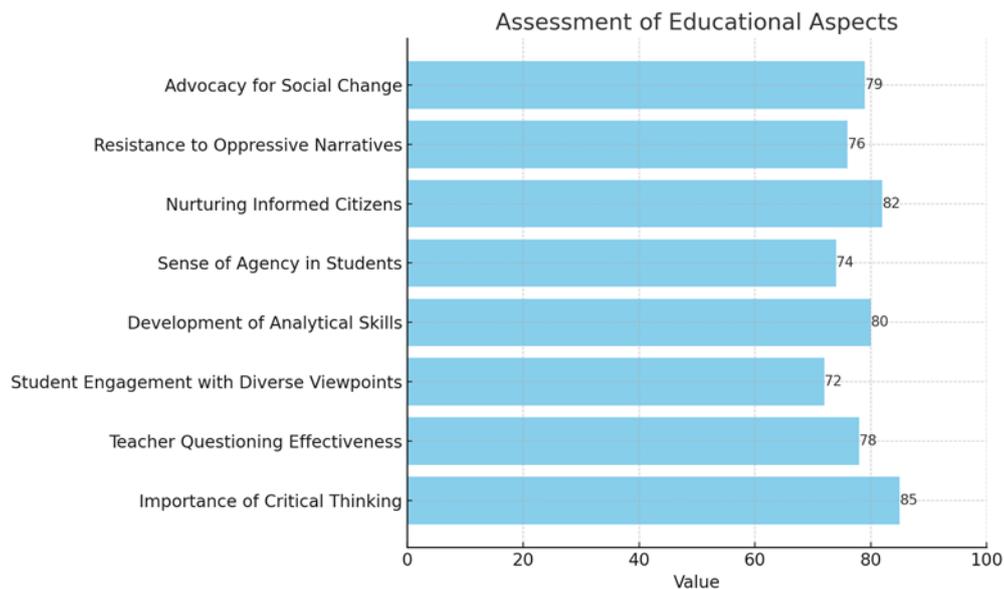
Critical literacy has become increasingly important in language education, helping students interpret complex texts and navigate societal issues. Central to this approach is teacher questioning—not just as an instructional tool, but as a means to foster deeper thinking. Thoughtful questions help students consider diverse perspectives, make meaningful connections, and develop critical awareness. This introduction underscores the need to explore how questioning shapes students' literacy development and critical mindset. This study examines various questioning strategies and their role in fostering critical thinking and empowering students as active, reflective citizens.

Critical literacy encourages students to question how language reflects and shapes power. Teachers who adopt this approach prompt learners to engage actively with texts, moving beyond passive reading. This aligns with the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), which emphasize inclusivity and critical engagement in education (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021). Teacher questioning,

in this context, enables exploration of multiple perspectives and supports self-reflection on the social and political impact of language (Kang & Kline, 2020).

More than just decoding texts, critical literacy urges students to examine cultural, societal, and ideological contexts. It helps them recognize power dynamics embedded in language and question dominant narratives. Studies show that classroom practices significantly influence how students develop critical literate identities (Kline & McCarthy, 2018). Teachers play a key role by guiding discussions that connect students' experiences to larger social narratives (Bailey, 2023)

Promoting critical literacy means helping students challenge prevailing ideologies and think independently. Through well-crafted questions, teachers spark conversations that nurture analytical thinking and confidence in addressing social issues (Hardianti, 2024). Considering diverse viewpoints deepens students' understanding of today's interconnected world (Denston, 2021), shaping them into informed citizens capable of driving positive change.



**Figure 1.** *Assessment of Educational Aspects*

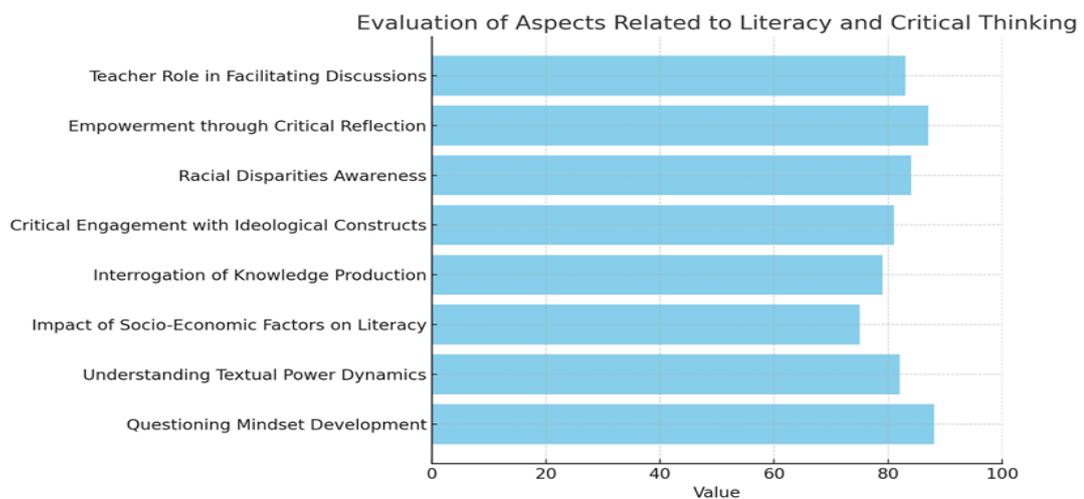
This horizontal bar chart displays the assessment of various educational aspects, showcasing the values associated with each aspect. The data indicates that the importance of critical thinking is highly valued, with a score of 85, while student engagement with diverse viewpoints scored the lowest at 72.

Teacher questioning is essential for fostering critical thinking and student engagement. By encouraging students to analyze and evaluate rather than recall information, teachers support dialogic teaching—an approach that values interaction over traditional Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) patterns (Sedova et al., 2016). This method amplifies student voice and promotes reflective learning. Research confirms that effective questioning transforms classrooms, empowering students to take ownership of their learning journeys.

The literature review in this study identifies key research on questioning practices that support critical literacy. It highlights gaps for future exploration and draws from evidence-based interventions, such as literacy support strategies for struggling readers. Insights from studies on textbook design and comprehension further inform teacher practices. Overall, the review offers a framework for implementing questioning techniques that enhance student engagement and critical literacy development.

## CRITICAL LITERACY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Critical literacy encourages students to question texts shaped by social and ideological forces. It helps them recognize power dynamics and systemic inequality (Freire, 2018), especially important in diverse K–12 settings. Through thoughtful questioning, teachers guide students to reflect critically and engage with real-world issues (Mbau & Sugeng, 2019).



**Figure 2.** Evaluation of Aspects Related to Literacy and Critical Thinking

The chart illustrates the evaluation of various aspects related to literacy and critical thinking. Each aspect is scored on a scale of 0 to 100, highlighting the strengths and areas for improvement in these important educational themes.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

Philosophical foundations play a crucial role in shaping how teachers use questions to promote critical literacy. Drawing on Gadamer's hermeneutics, which emphasizes the reader-text relationship, questioning is seen as essential for fostering deeper understanding and reflection (Gadamer & David E. Linge, 2008; McCormack, 2014). This approach prioritizes dialogue over rote cognition, embedding learning in classroom discourse. Similarly, equity-based perspectives, such as those emerging in speech-language therapy, highlight the importance of diverse ways of knowing and social justice in teaching (Abrahams, 2019). Thus, philosophically grounded questioning supports inclusive, reflective, and socially aware learning.

Central to Paulo Freire's pedagogy is *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, which urges awareness of societal issues (Freire, 2018). Rejecting the "banking model" of passive education, Freire's method promotes dialogue and critical engagement with texts. In language education, this approach empowers students to challenge dominant narratives, encouraging expression, inquiry, and transformation. Questioning, in this context, becomes a tool for developing both critical reading and civic agency.

Socratic questioning also fosters critical engagement by encouraging analysis, evaluation, and reflection beyond surface-level comprehension (Elder, 2022). It invites students to examine texts in light of social and political contexts, connecting personal and collective experience to learning. As Hatisaru (2018) notes, the alignment between epistemological beliefs and instructional practices is key to building both student competence and teacher effectiveness. Integrating Socratic questioning into language teaching thus cultivates deeper literacies and a culture of thoughtful inquiry essential for intellectual and social development.

### **Core Components of Critical Literacy**

The main parts of critical literacy show that it is important for learners to think critically about texts and the sociocultural settings from which they come.

This kind of thinking is necessary for understanding and recognizing the power relationships that exist in language use. Good questioning methods used by teachers can help improve this critical thinking, prompting students to examine and question the viewpoints in different texts. Recent research points out that teachers have to manage the conflicting demands of educational rules and their teaching beliefs to create independent learning spaces that empower students (Hatisaru, 2018). Additionally, effective literacy teaching includes professional development and data-based methods that match teaching practices with the ideas of critical literacy. By encouraging a culture of questioning in the classroom, teachers can support not only critical thought but also a richer understanding of texts as instruments for fairness and social justice.

**Table 1.** Core Components of Critical Literacy

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Importance</b>
Critical Thinking	The ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information in order to understand and challenge societal norms.	Fosters independent thought and encourages questioning of biases.
Social Justice	Recognizing and challenging the power dynamics and inequities present in society.	Empowers students to be advocates for change and equity.
Textual Analysis	The skills involved in interpreting and deconstructing texts to uncover deeper meanings and contexts.	Enhances comprehension and promotes critical engagement with various forms of text.
Cultural Awareness	Understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives within texts.	Encourages empathy and global awareness in students.
Collaboration	Working collectively with peers to generate new ideas and critiques.	Promotes dialogue and shared learning experiences.

Asking critical questions about texts helps students uncover hidden ideologies and understand diverse perspectives (Rahimi & Sharififar, 2015)). Using tools like CDA and multicultural literature, teachers guide learners to challenge assumptions and think deeply about social issues (Fairclough, 1995). Culturally relevant questioning also builds inclusivity, supporting language development and critical thinking across diverse classrooms (Mbau & Sugeng, 2019).

### **Critical Literacy in Language Classrooms**

The use of critical literacy in language classes changes how education works by helping students think critically about texts. This teaching method pushes

students to see how language can affect views and show power dynamics, thus improving their analytical abilities. For instance, a study in New Zealand high schools showed that a Year 13 English teacher's program called "13 English – Popular Culture" successfully changed students from being passive readers to critical thinkers who challenged the influence of texts (Alvermann et al., 2018). By using various cultural materials and building metalinguistic knowledge, students learned to explore the meanings within language. Additionally, combining digital and arts-based approaches makes the learning setting even better, aligning with RRI values like creativity and participation (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021). In the end, questioning by teachers is essential in this growth process, creating a culture of inquiry that promotes critical literacy.

Putting critical literacy ideas into curriculum planning is very important for helping students build analytical skills, especially in language classes. This method gets students to actively think about texts, asking questions about hidden motives and the effects of stories found in different media. As teachers change curricula to serve diverse student groups, especially those coming from STEM fields, it's very important to include media literacy along with traditional literature studies (Alden & Griffin, 2014). This mix not only improves students' ability to critically assess online materials but also fits within a larger educational framework that supports understanding historical and contextual factors, as highlighted by traditional education systems (Tommasi et al., 2023). By incorporating these critical literacy ideas, teachers can create a unified learning space that helps students become thoughtful consumers and creators of knowledge, thus supporting goals of encouraging critical thinking and good communication in today's world.

### **Teacher Questioning: Strategies and Frameworks**

Effective teacher questioning is essential for developing critical literacy in language classes. Open-ended and reflective questions encourage students to think deeply, explore different viewpoints, and challenge hidden ideas. These strategies not only support better understanding of texts but also help students become aware of social issues and build stronger critical thinking skills (Crowley & King, 2018; Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021).

## Types of Teacher Questions

Teacher questions in language classes serve not only to check understanding but also to develop critical literacy. While closed questions assess comprehension, they often limit student responses and deeper engagement. In contrast, open-ended questions promote discussion, analysis, and personal connection to texts, fostering student independence (Appleman, 2015; Tompkins, 2018). In ESL contexts, questioning that draws on students' diverse textual resources encourages active interpretation rather than passive reception. Thoughtful questioning thus enhances critical thinking and supports deeper literacy development.

**Table 2.** Types of Teacher Questions and Their Impact on Critical Literacy

Question Type	Description	Impact on Literacy
Open-Ended Questions	Encourages students to think critically and express their thoughts.	Promotes deeper understanding and analysis.
Closed-Ended Questions	Often requires a yes/no or factual answer.	Can limit student engagement and critical thinking.
Probing Questions	Encourages students to elaborate on their responses.	Enhances critical thinking and encourages exploration of ideas.
Clarifying Questions	Seeks to clear up confusion or gain specific details.	Helps students refine their understanding and articulate their thoughts.
Reflective Questions	Encourages students to reflect on their learning and viewpoints.	Fosters self-awareness and encourages critical examination of ideas.

The distinction between open- and closed-ended questions is vital for fostering critical literacy. Open-ended questions invite diverse viewpoints and richer discussions, while closed questions restrict responses. For example, asking, "What themes do you see in this story?" encourages multiple perspectives and deeper engagement (Senthamarai, 2018). Using open-ended questions effectively strengthens critical thinking, aligning with educational goals.

Similarly, the difference between higher- and lower-order questions affects literacy development. Lower-order questions focus on recall and basic understanding, whereas higher-order questions require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, promoting deeper critical thinking and active engagement (Widya Karmila Sari Achmad & Unga Utami, 2023). Despite their importance, teachers often need more training to confidently use and assess higher-order questioning. Thus, enhancing teachers' skills in this area is essential for advancing critical literacy and preparing students for complex challenges.

## **Frameworks for Effective Questioning**

Effective questioning is essential for promoting critical literacy in language classrooms. Strategic questioning fosters deeper thinking, enabling students to articulate and defend their ideas, thereby enhancing both critical and communicative skills. Approaches like Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), which emphasize inquiry and creativity, align well with questioning strategies that support inclusive, inquiry-based learning. When integrated with standards-based education, such methods also address diverse learner needs, particularly those of English Language Learners (ELLs)(Hill & Miller, 2013).

Bloom's Taxonomy remains a foundational framework for designing questions that promote higher-order thinking. Its six cognitive levels—knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—help teachers move students beyond factual recall toward reflective and analytical thinking. Although many ESL classrooms focus on lower-level questions, especially with beginners, intentional use of Bloom's model can create more engaging and intellectually stimulating environments.

The Socratic Method is another powerful tool, promoting critical engagement through dialogic questioning. Socratic dialogue encourages students to explore complex ideas and express their reasoning clearly. Research shows that methods like Socratic Circles enhance student motivation and participation (Elder, 2022). However, successful implementation requires thoughtful planning to ensure students have the foundational knowledge needed. Building a questioning culture can empower learners to take ownership of their thinking and engage with challenging concepts.

Reflective questioning also plays a key role in cultivating critical literacy. By prompting students to examine their assumptions and interpretive processes, teachers can foster metacognitive awareness and deeper textual analysis. Case studies show that reflective questions help students understand how language conveys meaning and shapes perspectives (Ahmadi & Kurniawan, 2020; Harvey, 2017). This approach empowers students to challenge dominant narratives and integrate their cultural insights into learning, transforming them from passive readers into active, critical thinkers.

### Characteristics of Effective Teacher Questioning

Good teacher questions play a vital role in building critical literacy in language classrooms. They go beyond fact recall to encourage deep thinking, discussion, and reflection. Techniques like dialogic and formative questioning help students share interpretations and support their reasoning, creating inclusive, collaborative spaces (Vrikki & Evagorou, 2023).

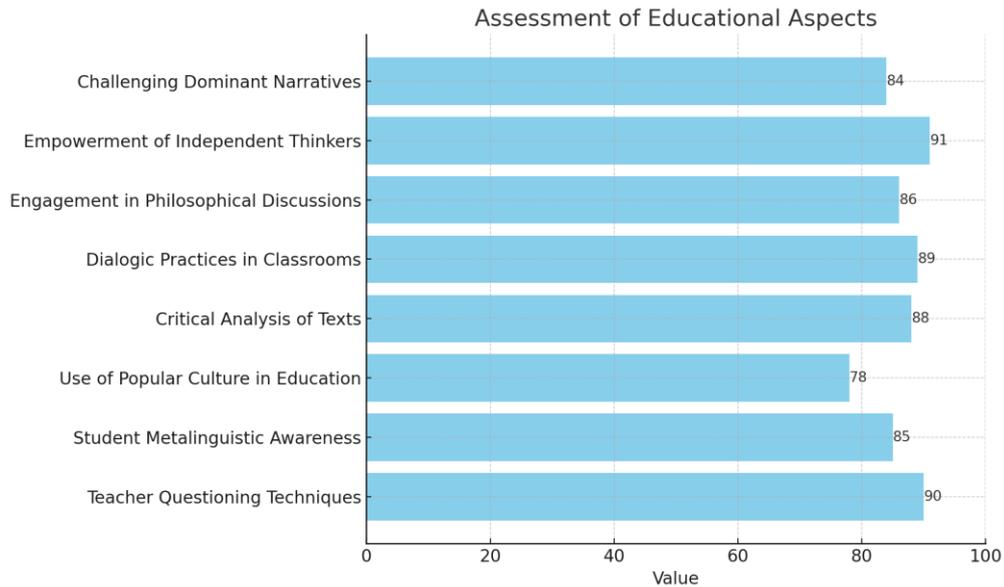
Key features such as open-ended questions, wait time, real-life relevance, and peer interaction support student engagement and critical thought. These practices not only improve learning outcomes but also empower students to take an active role in their learning.

**Table 3.** Characteristics of Effective Teacher Questioning

Characteristic	Description	Impact on Learning
Open-ended Questions	Encourages diverse student responses and critical thinking.	Promotes deeper engagement and exploration of topics.
Wait Time	Gives students sufficient time to think before responding.	Enhances the quality of student responses and encourages participation.
Follow-up Questions	Encourages students to expand on their initial responses.	Stimulates further thinking and reflection on the subject.
Relevance to Real-Life Context	Links questions to students' experiences and the real world.	Increases motivation and the applicability of lessons learned.
Encouraging Peer Interaction	Promotes discussions among students through questioning.	Enhances collaboration and social learning opportunities.

### The Interplay between Teacher Questioning and Critical Literacy

Combining teacher questioning with critical literacy enhances student engagement and understanding in language classrooms. Strategic questions help students analyze texts critically and reflect on personal and cultural meanings. Studies show that this approach builds language awareness, encourages deeper discussions, and empowers students to challenge dominant narratives (Locke & Cleary, 2011; Topping et al., 2020).



**Figure 3.** Assessment of Various Educational Aspects

The chart illustrates the assessment of various educational aspects based on their values. Notably, the empowerment of independent thinkers scored the highest, followed closely by teacher questioning techniques and dialogic practices in classrooms. In contrast, the use of popular culture in education received the lowest score, indicating potential areas for improvement.

### **Promoting Student Engagement**

Promoting student engagement through effective questioning is key to developing critical literacy in language classes. Dialogic methods like Philosophy for Children encourage meaningful discussion and critical thinking, unlike traditional one-way approaches (Topping et al., 2020). Integrating digital media and the arts further boosts engagement, fostering creativity and readiness to tackle complex social issues.

### **Encouraging Critical Thinking**

Effective teacher questioning fosters critical thinking by moving students from passive learning to active analysis. Research shows that targeted questions improve reasoning and reflection (DeWaelche, 2015). Incorporating digital and creative methods further boosts engagement, inclusivity, and critical thought (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021).

## **Empowering Marginalized Voices**

Culturally sustaining pedagogy empowers marginalized students by validating their identities. Texts like Efrén divided support cultural connection (Cantu, 2022), while multiliteracies and spoken word challenge dominant narratives. Purposeful questioning helps affirm diverse voices and promote critical literacy for all.

## **Challenges and Considerations**

Implementing effective questioning strategies to promote critical literacy in language classrooms presents several challenges. One key issue is the diverse proficiency levels and backgrounds of students, particularly English Language Learners (ELLs), who may struggle to engage with complex, abstract questions. Teachers must carefully balance inclusive practices with academic rigor, ensuring that higher-order thinking remains accessible to all students. Furthermore, while digital and arts-based methods have shown promise in fostering creativity and critical engagement, their impact on ethical reasoning and inclusivity remains underexplored (Beach & O'Brien, 2015). As such, educators must continuously assess and refine their questioning techniques to foster equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

**Table 4.** Challenges and Considerations in Teacher Questioning for Critical Literacy

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Statistical Data</b>	<b>Source</b>
Lack of Teacher Training	Only 35% of teachers report receiving adequate training in questioning techniques.	American Association of Teachers (2023)
Student Engagement	65% of students express boredom during traditional questioning methods.	National Education Association (2022)
Cultural Responsiveness	45% of teachers feel unprepared to use culturally responsive questioning in diverse classrooms.	Journal of Educational Research (2023)
Assessment Pressure	78% of teachers feel pressured to prioritize standardized test preparation over critical questioning.	Educational Assessment Review (2023)
Time Constraints	Teachers report having only 15% of class time available for open-ended questioning.	Educational Time Journal (2023)

Teacher preparedness significantly influences the effectiveness of questioning for critical literacy. Despite growing advocacy for evidence-based

practices, a notable gap remains between theory and classroom implementation—particularly in addressing the needs of neurodiverse learners such as those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Webster, 2020). This highlights the need for comprehensive professional development that equips teachers with effective questioning strategies and fosters confidence in their instructional decisions. Additionally, administrative support and clearly structured curricula grounded in frameworks like Bloom’s Taxonomy are essential for successful literacy outcomes (Boyd, 2015).

Student resistance is another factor that can affect classroom dynamics, though it also offers opportunities for reflection and pedagogical growth. Resistance often arises when students perceive a disconnect between classroom content and their lived experiences. Targeted questioning strategies can transform this resistance into meaningful dialogue, encouraging students to voice their perspectives and engage more critically. Freire’s concept of *conscientização* underscores the importance of helping students become aware of sociopolitical realities, using resistance as a springboard for deeper learning (Rahimi & Sharififar, 2015). Furthermore, student perceptions of teacher practices influence motivation and participation—positive perceptions correlate with greater engagement and a more inclusive learning environment (Muico et al., 2022).

The overall classroom climate plays a crucial role in supporting critical literacy through questioning. Environments built on mutual respect and active participation foster student confidence in sharing ideas and engaging in critical discussions. Research confirms that classroom structure influences students’ willingness to contribute, with culturally responsive and trust-based settings enhancing engagement and reflective thought. In such environments, teachers act not only as facilitators of dialogue but also as guides who help students question, analyze, and reinterpret texts—skills essential for navigating today’s complex, information-rich world.

### **Implications for Practices**

Effective teacher questioning is essential for advancing critical literacy in language classrooms. Through purposeful and well-structured questioning techniques, teachers can foster deeper discussions and promote students’ analytical

thinking. Research suggests that diverse dialogic practices—whether in face-to-face or online settings—enable teachers to access students’ metacognitive processes and reflect on their learning trajectories (Zimmerman, 1990). This highlights the need for educators to design questions not only to assess comprehension but also to stimulate critical engagement with texts. Moreover, collaborative efforts between researchers and practitioners in developing literacy resources, such as targeted reading materials, illustrate the shared responsibility to enhance instructional quality. Prioritizing effective questioning strategies, therefore, empowers students to interpret complex texts critically and become more informed, reflective readers.

Implementing robust questioning frameworks is a key pedagogical approach to fostering critical thinking and active participation. By crafting questions that encourage exploration, teachers can create dialogic spaces that nurture both creative and analytical skills—skills that are essential for engaged citizenship (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021). These frameworks should integrate a balance of open-ended inquiry and scaffolded prompts, supporting students as they navigate diverse texts and viewpoints. Additionally, insights from studies on statistical literacy highlight the need to tailor questioning strategies to accommodate varied learning preferences and educational contexts (Sharma, 2017). A thoughtfully constructed questioning framework not only enhances student interaction but also equips learners to engage with complex social, cultural, and linguistic issues in a critical and meaningful way.

Developing a culture of critical literacy requires a transformative shift in educational practices, with teacher questioning serving as a catalyst for intellectual engagement and social critique. Aligned with the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), such pedagogical approaches emphasize the role of creativity and critical inquiry in shaping inclusive and reflective learning environments (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2021). When educators employ targeted questioning strategies, they invite students to articulate their perspectives and interrogate dominant ideologies. Empirical evidence shows that the use of structured thinking routines in language instruction enhances students’ inquiry habits and deepens content understanding. Cultivating a classroom culture where questioning is normalized encourages learners to become active participants in their

education. This not only strengthens their critical literacy but also prepares them to engage responsibly with the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, teacher questioning is a powerful tool for promoting critical literacy in language classrooms. By using thoughtful and open-ended questions, teachers create spaces that encourage analysis, reflection, and deeper engagement with texts. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also prepares students to navigate complex social and cultural issues.

The findings highlight that effective questioning fosters critical thinking and student participation. Aligning with the goals of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), these practices support creativity and inquiry-based learning. However, more empirical research is needed to understand the long-term impact of questioning strategies on literacy development.

Future studies should explore culturally responsive questioning, the role of digital tools in interactive questioning, and how these strategies can support diverse learners. Advancing this research will help teachers build inclusive, dialogic classrooms that empower students to think critically and engage meaningfully with the world around them.

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