



Reconsidering Reading Strategy Instruction as a Pedagogical Lens for Critical Literacy in EFL Reading

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Abstract

Critical literacy has become a central goal of EFL reading instruction, extending the purposes of reading beyond comprehension to learners' engagement with representation, identity, ideology, power, and social participation. Although earlier research has advanced critical literacy through a range of instructional models and classroom practices, far less attention has been paid to how the pedagogical knowledge built up in reading strategy instruction (RSI) can inform these broader goals. This conceptual paper therefore reconsiders RSI as a lens for understanding how teachers support learners as those purposes expand. Drawing on research in both fields, it argues that familiar strategic and metacognitive processes can serve critical thinking and critical literacy as well as comprehension once teachers deliberately orient them toward these wider purposes. A classroom vignette and a comparison of six representative processes across reading orientations then illustrate how such a reorientation can work in practice.

INTRODUCTION

Critical literacy has become a central goal of EFL reading instruction (Janks, 2010). Rather than focusing solely on comprehension, current EFL reading instruction encourages learners to engage critically with texts in relation to representation, identity, ideology, power, and social participation (Luke, 2012). From this perspective, reading extends beyond constructing textual meaning to include opportunities for questioning assumptions, considering multiple perspectives, and reflecting on broader social and cultural issues.

This shift has changed both the goals and the practices of EFL reading instruction. Critical literacy research has explored literary and multimodal texts, digital media, classroom dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and socially relevant issues through which learners critically interpret and reconstruct meaning (Afrilyasanti et al., 2023, 2025; Ávila & Pandya, 2013). EFL reading classrooms have encouraged learners to explore texts from multiple perspectives and connect reading with wider social and cultural questions. In other words, as the goals of reading have expanded, attention has shifted toward what learners do with texts. Less attention, however, has been paid to the instructional processes that support learners' movement

from comprehension toward critical engagement with texts. Although classroom studies have documented discussions, reflective activities, and collaborative inquiry, they have said less about how teachers support this movement during reading. One way of addressing this instructional question is to draw on what existing approaches to reading instruction have already revealed about how teachers guide learners during reading. Among these, reading strategy instruction (hereafter RSI) is particularly relevant because it has developed a sustained body of research on explicit strategy instruction, metacognitive reflection, and the gradual transfer of responsibility as ways of guiding learners' reading (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Although RSI has traditionally been associated with supporting comprehension, its accumulated pedagogical knowledge provides a useful conceptual foundation for considering how critical literacy may likewise be supported during reading.

This paper, therefore, argues that RSI offers a pedagogical perspective for understanding how teachers support learners' movement from comprehension toward critical literacy. Rather than proposing new reading strategies or another instructional model, it reconsiders RSI as a pedagogical perspective for understanding how strategic and metacognitive processes may support the broader educational purposes of critical literacy. Specifically, it examines how these processes may be intentionally oriented to support comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy as the educational purposes of reading expand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Strategy Instruction in EFL

From Teaching Reading Strategies to Fostering Strategic Reading

RSI has long been regarded as one of the most influential approaches to EFL reading pedagogy. Early research demonstrated that successful readers actively employ cognitive and metacognitive strategies while constructing meaning from texts (Carrell, 1998; Grabe, 2009). Explicit instruction in strategies such as predicting, questioning, monitoring, inferencing, and summarizing has become a central component of reading instruction. Meta-analytic evidence has also supported the overall effectiveness of second language strategy instruction (Plonsky, 2011), helping establish RSI as an evidence-based approach to reading pedagogy. Building on these findings, more recent research has shifted its focus from teaching individual strategies toward fostering strategic reading as a flexible, goal-directed process (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Instead of treating strategic reading as the acquisition of discrete techniques, current perspectives on RSI emphasize learners' ability to coordinate strategic and metacognitive processes in response to changing reading purposes, textual demands, and instructional contexts.

This shift has important implications for classroom instruction. Instead of presenting strategies as isolated skills to be mastered, current RSI research focuses more explicitly on how teachers support learners in selecting, coordinating, and adapting strategic processes during reading. Explicit instruction, therefore, extends beyond introducing strategy labels or modeling reading procedures. It also involves guided practice, teacher scaffolding, metacognitive reflection, and the gradual transfer of responsibility, enabling learners to make more independent strategic decisions while engaging with texts (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019).

A stronger emphasis on metacognition further reflects this broader understanding of strategic reading. Recent studies have focused less on whether learners use particular strategies and more on how they monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own reading processes. From this perspective, strategic reading is viewed as an ongoing process of self-regulated meaning making that develops through explicit instructional support and reflective engagement with texts (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Overall, RSI has gradually evolved from teaching individual reading strategies to fostering strategic readers. This evolution provides the conceptual foundation for the present discussion. It suggests that the value of RSI lies not only in the strategies it teaches but also in the pedagogical knowledge it has developed about how teachers support learners' engagement with texts.

Broadening the Scope of RSI

The shift toward strategic reading has also expanded the educational purposes of RSI. Whereas early intervention studies primarily evaluated RSI in terms of reading comprehension gains, more recent research has emphasized broader pedagogical aims, including metacognitive regulation, strategic flexibility, learner engagement, and the transfer of strategic reading

across tasks and contexts (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). From this perspective, strategic reading is no longer understood simply as the successful application of reading strategies but as learners' capacity to regulate reading in response to changing purposes, texts, and learning contexts.

Recent studies continue to demonstrate that explicit strategy instruction contributes positively to learners' reading comprehension across diverse EFL contexts (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Akkakoson, 2013; Fathi & Afzali, 2020; Li et al., 2022). Emerging evidence further suggests that instructional outcomes extend beyond comprehension alone. For example, Li et al. (2022) found that although explicit strategy instruction significantly improved learners' reading comprehension, changes in strategy use, motivation, and self-efficacy were more nuanced, suggesting that broader instructional outcomes depend on interactions among instructional design, learner characteristics, and classroom contexts. These findings suggest that the value of RSI should not be evaluated only through comprehension gains. Rather, they suggest that RSI has generated broader pedagogical knowledge about how learners' strategic engagement with texts can be supported across different instructional contexts.

Attention has also turned to the contextual nature of strategic reading. Recent work no longer treats strategy use as a stable learner characteristic but instead views strategic reading as responsive to instructional purposes, text characteristics, learner proficiency, and classroom contexts (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). From this perspective, the central question is no longer whether learners use more reading strategies, but how classroom conditions and teacher mediation enable them to employ strategic and metacognitive processes flexibly and appropriately. This perspective further reinforces the view of RSI as a source of instructional knowledge that extends beyond comprehension toward more purposeful and self-regulated engagement with texts.

The growing use of digital and multimodal texts has highlighted the contextual nature of strategic reading. Digital technologies are increasingly viewed as instructional resources that complement explicit strategy instruction by supporting learners' strategic engagement with texts. For example, K. R. Lee et al. (2023) reported that video-based strategy instruction supported Korean middle school learners' strategic reading processes. Similarly, R. Kim (2024) demonstrated that integrating ChatGPT into explicit instruction on identifying main ideas promoted learners' top-down processing without replacing strategic reading itself.

Overall, RSI has evolved in three important respects. It has shifted from teaching discrete strategies toward fostering strategic reading through teacher guidance and scaffolded participation, expanded its educational purposes beyond comprehension, and conceptualized strategic reading as a situated practice shaped by learners, texts, instructional tasks, and sociocultural contexts. These developments suggest that RSI now encompasses broader pedagogical knowledge than its early focus on strategy instruction might imply. Even so, this knowledge has continued to be applied primarily to reading comprehension, strategic awareness, and self-regulated reading. Relatively little attention has been paid to how the same strategic and metacognitive processes might support learners in interrogating assumptions, recognizing multiple perspectives, or questioning how texts construct representations of people and society.

A small but growing body of research nevertheless suggests possible points of convergence between RSI and critical literacy. For example, Kurt Taşpınar and Çubukçu (2020) argued that developing learners' critical literacy requires sustained teacher guidance beyond short-term interventions and emphasized the importance of explicit scaffolding throughout the reading process. More broadly, RSI research has consistently emphasized explicit strategy instruction, metacognitive reflection, scaffolded participation, and the gradual transfer of responsibility as key principles for supporting learners' engagement with texts. These observations suggest that RSI has accumulated substantial pedagogical knowledge about how teachers support learners through explicit guidance and scaffolded participation across the reading process. However, this knowledge has rarely been interpreted in relation to the broader educational aims of critical literacy. As a result, the potential contribution of RSI to critical literacy has remained largely implicit within the literature.

Critical Literacy in EFL

Critical Literacy in Contemporary EFL Education

Although critical reading and critical literacy are often used interchangeably in EFL research, they represent different conceptions of reading. Critical reading has traditionally emphasized evaluating textual credibility, identifying arguments, and assessing evidence, whereas critical literacy extends the purposes of reading by examining how texts construct particular representations of reality, privilege certain voices, and position readers within broader social, cultural, and ideological relations (Luke, 2012). Instead of viewing texts as neutral sources of information, critical literacy conceptualizes reading as a socially situated practice through which learners interrogate, negotiate, and reconstruct meanings.

The theoretical foundations of critical literacy are commonly associated with Freire's (1970) conception of reading the word and the world, which views literacy as a dialogic process of questioning social realities rather than merely acquiring technical skills. Building on this perspective, Janks (2010) argues that critical literacy involves understanding the relationships among power, access, diversity, and design, while Luke (2012) emphasizes its dynamic and context-dependent nature across changing literacy environments. From this perspective, critical literacy is viewed not as an advanced form of reading comprehension but as an educational approach that encourages learners to interrogate assumptions, recognize multiple perspectives, and construct alternative meanings through language.

Recent EFL research has shifted from establishing the theoretical legitimacy of critical literacy to examining how it can be enacted across diverse instructional contexts. Instead of relying on a single pedagogical model, recent studies have explored multiple pathways through which learners critically engage with texts, including literary narratives, picture books, multimodal and digital texts, media discourse, community issues, and classroom dialogue (Afrilyasanti et al., 2023, 2025; Pederson, 2023; Porto et al., 2018). Despite their differences, these studies share a common concern: supporting learners in examining how texts represent people, cultures, identities, and social issues while positioning themselves as active meaning-makers.

One prominent direction has been the continued use of literary texts as accessible sites for critical inquiry. Studies conducted across diverse EFL contexts suggest that literary texts are linguistically manageable while offering conceptually rich opportunities for learners to examine multiple perspectives, marginalized voices, and alternative social possibilities (Porto et al., 2018). Similar tendencies can be observed in Korean EFL classrooms, where literary texts and visual narratives have been employed to encourage learners to engage critically with issues such as gender, environmental sustainability, and intercultural understanding (Huh & Suh, 2018; E. H. Lee, 2021; S. Lee & Suh, 2022). These studies indicate that literary texts are valued not simply for their linguistic accessibility but for their capacity to generate dialogue, perspective-taking, and critical reflection.

Another important development has been the growing emphasis on multimodal and digital texts as sites for critical meaning-making. Recent studies have emphasized that contemporary literacy requires learners to interpret images, videos, advertisements, online interactions, and other multimodal representations alongside written language (Afrilyasanti et al., 2023, 2025; Pederson, 2023). Korean research reflects a similar trajectory through studies examining media literacy, textbook adaptation, communication-oriented materials, and multimodal classroom practices (Huh & Suh, 2024; Suh, 2023). Multimodal and digital texts are no longer treated simply as supplementary classroom resources but as integral to contemporary critical literacy because they expand opportunities for learners to interpret, negotiate, and redesign meanings across diverse communicative environments.

Critical literacy research has also placed greater emphasis on dialogue, inquiry, and social participation. Beyond viewing critical literacy as the acquisition of critical analytical skills alone, recent studies conceptualize it as a dialogic practice through which learners collaboratively examine social issues, negotiate diverse viewpoints, and connect textual interpretation with their own experiences and communities (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012; Porto et al., 2018). Korean studies similarly extend critical literacy toward critical global citizenship, identity formation, and curriculum adaptation, suggesting that learners are encouraged not only to critique existing representations but also to consider their own roles as ethical and socially responsible participants in diverse societies (Huh & Suh, 2018; Suh, 2019). Across these diverse strands of research, critical literacy is consistently enacted through purposeful teacher guidance that supports learners in questioning assumptions, examining multiple perspectives, and participating in collaborative meaning-making. However, less attention has been paid to explaining, from a pedagogical perspective, how such instructional guidance supports learners' critical engagement with texts.

Current Directions and an Instructional Gap

Recent developments suggest that critical literacy research in EFL has entered a new phase of pedagogical diversification. Whereas earlier studies primarily focused on introducing critical perspectives through literary texts and classroom discussion, more recent research has diversified both the objects of critique and the educational contexts in which critical literacy is enacted (Afrilyasanti et al., 2023, 2025; Pederson, 2023; Porto et al., 2018). Current research incorporates multimodal resources, digital media, social networking platforms, AI-mediated texts, and community-based inquiry, reflecting broader understandings of literacy in digitally mediated societies (Huh & Suh, 2024; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Critical literacy is no longer viewed simply as an additional component of language instruction. It is now understood as an integral dimension of language learning through which learners critically interpret representations, negotiate identities, and participate ethically across diverse communicative environments (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021).

As critical literacy has expanded, growing attention has also been directed toward instructional design and teacher learning. Recent studies have emphasized that successful critical literacy instruction depends not only on the selection of meaningful texts but also on how instruction supports learners through critical questioning, dialogic interaction, instructional materials, and learners' reflective participation (Huh & Suh, 2024; Jung, 2023). A recent classroom-based study has further demonstrated that procedural, conceptual, motivational, and metacognitive scaffolding play important roles in supporting learners' critical engagement with texts (Susilowaty et al., 2025). Another strand of research emphasizes that critical literacy is mediated not only through cognitive inquiry but also through learners' emotional engagement. Instead of treating emotions as incidental classroom responses, these studies demonstrate that empathy, discomfort, curiosity, and personal connection can encourage learners to question assumptions, negotiate diverse perspectives, and sustain critical dialogue (Huh & Suh, 2021; Suh, 2023). Teacher education research further indicates that although teachers generally recognize the educational value of critical literacy, many continue to report challenges associated with limited pedagogical preparation, insufficient instructional resources, and curriculum constraints (Balıkcıoğlu Akkuş & Uysal, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, comparatively less attention has been devoted to explaining how these instructional resources and practices can be integrated into coherent classroom instruction. Existing studies provide valuable examples of dialogic inquiry, critical questioning, material adaptation, multimodal redesign, affective engagement, and instructional mediation, but they rarely explain how these instructional practices can be coordinated to foster critical literacy across diverse EFL contexts. The challenge lies less in identifying additional critical literacy practices than in explaining how they can be integrated into coherent classroom instruction.

These observations point to a broader instructional question: Can insights from established approaches to reading instruction help explain how critical literacy may be supported in classroom practice? Addressing this question requires a pedagogical perspective that explains not only what learners do during critical literacy activities but also how learners' critical engagement with texts is instructionally supported over time. The following discussion, therefore, considers whether the pedagogical knowledge developed within RSI offers one useful perspective for addressing this question.

DISCUSSION

Reading Strategy Instruction as a Pedagogical Perspective for Critical Literacy

Based on the preceding review, this discussion examines whether RSI offers a useful pedagogical perspective for understanding how critical literacy is enacted in EFL reading classrooms. It begins by considering how existing models of critical literacy conceptualize teacher guidance before examining what RSI may contribute to this issue.

A variety of instructional models have been proposed for implementing critical literacy in classroom practice. Foundational frameworks such as the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1999) and the instructional framework developed by Lewison et al. (2008) emphasize learners' active engagement with texts through explicit instruction, collaborative inquiry, and critical dialogue. EFL-oriented models have also demonstrated how critical thinking and critical literacy may be fostered through carefully designed classroom activities, teacher mediation, and scaffolded participation (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Ibrahim, 2022). Despite differences in their instructional procedures and educational contexts, these models converge on a common concern: how teachers support learners in reading texts critically.

The convergence across these models suggests that established traditions of reading pedagogy may offer useful insights into critical literacy instruction. RSI is especially relevant because it offers a sustained perspective on how teachers support learners' engagement with texts over time. The relevance of RSI lies primarily in the instructional principles developed through decades of research on reading instruction, not in the particular strategies it has traditionally promoted. Research within the RSI tradition has emphasized explicit teacher guidance, strategic awareness, scaffolded participation, metacognitive reflection, and the gradual transfer of responsibility (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). These instructional principles are relevant because they help explain how complex reading processes are made visible through explicit instruction, scaffolded participation, and metacognitive support. When oriented toward the broader purposes of critical literacy, these principles draw attention to the instructional work through which critical interpretation may be initiated, supported, and extended. Importantly, these instructional principles do not redefine the educational goals of critical literacy. Rather, they help make teacher guidance more explicit by providing a pedagogical perspective through which critical literacy instruction can be understood. From this perspective, reading strategies function not as instructional ends in themselves but as resources that support the broader educational purposes of critical literacy.

Adopting this perspective does not require redefining individual reading strategies. It requires reconsidering how familiar

strategic and metacognitive processes are framed, guided, and connected to different educational purposes. As those purposes extend beyond comprehension, the same processes may contribute to critical thinking and critical literacy without losing their role in meaning construction. The following section develops this perspective by examining how representative strategic and metacognitive processes within RSI may be conceptually related to comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy.

Relationship Between RSI, Critical Thinking, and Critical Literacy

If RSI is viewed as a pedagogical perspective, the next question is how its familiar strategic and metacognitive processes relate to critical literacy. This section addresses that question by examining the role of critical thinking as the conceptual link between RSI and critical literacy. Traditionally, RSI has primarily supported learners' comprehension through explicit instruction in strategic and metacognitive reading processes, whereas critical literacy has emphasized learners' engagement with texts as socially and ideologically situated forms of meaning-making. These different educational emphases, however, do not necessarily indicate that the two traditions are pedagogically incompatible. Rather, they highlight different but complementary dimensions of reading instruction. The discussion, therefore, considers how these processes may be reoriented toward broader pedagogical aims as the goals of reading expand from comprehension to critical thinking and critical literacy. Critical thinking is proposed here as the conceptual link through which these processes can be related to critical literacy. It is not treated as a separate instructional stage but as an explanatory perspective for understanding how these familiar processes may serve broader educational purposes while remaining grounded in learners' engagement with texts.

Strategic questioning, metacognitive monitoring, inferencing, evaluation, reflection, and self-regulation have long been recognized as central processes within RSI because they support learners' active construction of meaning and regulation of comprehension. These same processes also encourage learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, consider alternative interpretations, and reflect on their own thinking, all of which are widely associated with critical thinking. Previous EFL research has also reported a positive relationship between learners' critical thinking ability and their use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies (Mohammadi et al., 2012). Critical literacy extends these forms of thinking by directing them toward questions of representation, perspective, ideology, identity, and social participation. In this sense, critical thinking primarily concerns how learners analyze, evaluate, and justify interpretations, whereas critical literacy directs such inquiry toward how texts construct particular representations and position readers within broader social and ideological contexts. Critical literacy, therefore, extends beyond critical thinking, although the two may draw on related forms of inquiry and reflection. The relationship proposed here is conceptual rather than developmental or hierarchical. Critical thinking is not viewed as a stage between comprehension and critical literacy, but as a link that helps explain how familiar strategic and metacognitive processes may contribute to critical literacy.

This perspective may be illustrated through a classroom vignette. Consider learners reading a picture book depicting the transformation of an abandoned urban space into a community garden. Within conventional RSI, questioning may primarily focus on identifying the sequence of events, clarifying textual information, and confirming comprehension. As instructional purposes broaden, however, this strategic process may encourage learners to examine the evidence supporting particular interpretations, consider alternative explanations, and justify their own responses to the text. When questioning is further oriented toward critical literacy, learners may also be invited to examine whose perspectives are represented, whose voices remain absent, what assumptions about community, responsibility, or environmental change are embedded in the narrative, and how different readers might interpret the story from different social positions. Importantly, the strategic process itself remains unchanged; what changes is the instructional purpose toward which it is directed. The shift lies not in the strategic process itself, but in how teachers frame inquiry, respond to learners' interpretations, and extend discussion toward broader social and ethical questions.

This vignette illustrates the central argument of the present paper. The strategic and metacognitive processes do not require reconceptualization to contribute to critical literacy; their educational significance depends on how they are pedagogically oriented. To make this conceptual argument more explicit, Table 1 summarizes how these processes may be interpreted across comprehension-, critical thinking-, and critical literacy-oriented reading instruction and illustrates how teacher guidance may support their orientation toward different educational purposes. The table is not intended to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of reading strategies. Rather, it presents representative strategic and metacognitive processes that have consistently been emphasized within the RSI literature as central to learners' engagement with texts (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). These six processes were selected because they capture broad, transferable forms of strategic and metacognitive engagement that can be oriented toward different instructional purposes

across diverse reading contexts. Consequently, they are more appropriate for illustrating shifts in instructional orientation than task-specific strategies such as predicting or summarizing.

Table 1 illustrates how changes in instructional orientation—not changes in the strategic processes themselves—shape their educational purposes. Specifically, it shows how these same processes may serve different educational purposes and how teacher guidance may support such shifts in orientation.

Table 1 should be understood as a heuristic rather than a prescription for classroom practice. It is not intended to classify reading strategies into separate categories or to suggest a progression from comprehension to critical literacy. Instead, it illustrates how these familiar processes may serve different instructional purposes as educational goals broaden. The same processes may, therefore, support different educational purposes, not because they change but because teachers intentionally orient them toward different forms of inquiry.

TABLE 1

Strategic and Metacognitive Processes across Reading Orientations

Strategic & metacognitive process	Comprehension-oriented use	Critical thinking-oriented use	Critical literacy-oriented use	Illustrative teacher guidance
Strategic questioning	Clarify textual meaning and identify key information	Examine evidence, identify assumptions, and consider alternative interpretations	Examine representation, perspective, marginalized voices, and social implications	Model questions that address textual meaning, evidence, perspectives, and assumptions; build on learners' responses to extend inquiry.
Metacognitive monitoring	Monitor comprehension and regulate understanding	Monitor reasoning and evaluate one's interpretation	Monitor how assumptions, experiences, and social positions shape one's interpretation	Prompt learners to examine both the textual basis of their interpretations and how their assumptions and experiences may shape those interpretations.
Reflection	Review learning and reading processes	Reflect on reasoning and decision-making	Reflect on relationships among self, others, and society, and reconsider one's own perspectives	Invite learners to reconsider initial interpretations, compare alternative perspectives, and reflect on how their views may have changed.
Inferencing	Construct meaning beyond explicitly stated information	Generate, compare, and justify alternative interpretations	Explore multiple perspectives and consider voices that may be overlooked or marginalized	Guide learners to use textual and contextual evidence to explore implied meanings and consider perspectives or voices that may be absent.
Evaluation	Judge credibility and relevance of textual information	Evaluate arguments and supporting evidence	Examine ideology, representation, power relations, and the consequences of particular interpretations	Encourage learners to examine the evidence and assumptions underlying claims and to consider how particular representations may privilege certain viewpoints.
Self-regulation	Independently manage reading processes	Independently regulate critical inquiry	Sustain independent, reflective, and socially responsible engagement with texts	Gradually shift responsibility to learners for sustaining inquiry, revising interpretations, and remaining open to alternative perspectives.

Note. The orientations presented in this table are conceptual rather than sequential. They illustrate possible instructional emphases rather than successive stages of reading development. These orientations may overlap according to instructional purposes, classroom contexts, and the ways teachers support learners' engagement with texts.

The conceptual shift illustrated in Table 1 may be observed most clearly in strategic questioning. Within comprehension-oriented reading instruction, questioning primarily supports learners in identifying key information, clarifying textual meaning, and monitoring understanding. A teacher may ask, for example, “Why did the main character leave the community?” or “What happened after the garden was created?” As instructional purposes broaden, learners may instead be asked, “What evidence supports your interpretation?” or “Could the story be understood differently?” Within critical literacy, questioning extends further by inviting learners to ask whose perspectives are represented, whose voices remain absent, and what assumptions about community, responsibility, or environmental change are embedded in the narrative. Importantly, the questioning process itself remains fundamentally unchanged. The instructional difference lies in how teachers frame questions, build on learners’ responses, and guide inquiry toward different educational purposes.

A similar pattern can be observed in metacognitive monitoring and reflective thinking. Within comprehension-oriented reading instruction, metacognitive monitoring helps learners determine whether they understand the text, recognize points of confusion, and adjust their reading when comprehension breaks down. As instructional purposes broaden, monitoring also involves evaluating whether one’s interpretation is supported by textual evidence and considering alternative explanations. Within critical literacy, monitoring extends to examining how one’s own assumptions, experiences, and social positions shape the process of meaning-making. Reflective thinking further complements monitoring by encouraging learners to reconsider not only what they have understood but also why they have interpreted the text in particular ways and how alternative perspectives might reshape that understanding. Teacher guidance may support this process by prompting learners to examine the basis of their interpretations and to reconsider them in light of alternative perspectives.

The same principle also applies to inferencing, evaluation, and self-regulation. Within comprehension-oriented reading instruction, inferencing supports learners in constructing meanings that are implied rather than explicitly stated, while evaluation focuses on judging the credibility and relevance of textual information. Self-regulation, in turn, helps learners manage their reading strategically and independently. As instructional purposes broaden, inferencing encourages learners to compare alternative interpretations, evaluation extends to examining the assumptions and evidence underlying those interpretations, and self-regulation supports learners in monitoring and revising their own reasoning. Within critical literacy, these familiar processes are directed toward broader questions of representation, ideology, power relations, and social responsibility. Learners are encouraged not only to infer what is implied in the text but also to consider whose perspectives may be absent, not only to evaluate information but also to question how particular interpretations privilege certain viewpoints, and not only to regulate their reading but also to sustain critical inquiry while remaining open to alternative perspectives. Viewed from the perspective of critical literacy, self-regulation, therefore, comes to involve not only the independent management of reading processes but also sustained reflective and socially responsible engagement with texts. Accordingly, teachers are not expected to introduce entirely new strategic processes but to frame, scaffold, and extend familiar ones in ways that support increasingly critical engagement with texts.

Viewed across the representative processes discussed above, the relationship among comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy becomes clearer. These orientations should not be understood as discrete stages of reading development; rather, they are better understood as complementary dimensions of learners’ engagement with texts. Although different instructional goals may foreground one orientation over another, they are not mutually exclusive and often coexist during meaningful classroom reading. Comprehension provides the foundation for constructing meaning, critical thinking supports the evaluation and interpretation of that meaning, and critical literacy extends these processes toward examining broader questions of representation, ideology, identity, and social participation (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012). Orienting reading instruction toward critical literacy, therefore, does not diminish the importance of comprehension. Rather, comprehension remains integral to critical engagement, while the purposes of reading expand to include more critical forms of interpretation and inquiry. Across these orientations, what changes is not the strategic or metacognitive process itself but the instructional purposes toward which it is directed. From this perspective, these processes do not belong exclusively to any one orientation. Instead, their educational significance depends on how teachers frame classroom inquiry, scaffold learners’ engagement, and support increasingly critical forms of reading. The pedagogical challenge, therefore, lies not in introducing fundamentally different strategic and metacognitive processes but in expanding the educational purposes these processes are intended to serve.

The conceptual perspective developed in this paper extends previous discussions of the relationships among comprehension, emotional engagement, critical thinking, and critical literacy in EFL reading (Suh & Huh, 2023) by clarifying how teacher guidance may orient familiar strategic and metacognitive processes toward these complementary educational purposes. In doing so, it shifts attention from identifying additional reading strategies to reconsidering how established instructional principles may be oriented toward expanded instructional goals. Instead of proposing new reading strategies or another instructional model, the present discussion reinterprets the pedagogical knowledge developed within the RSI tradition as a conceptual resource for understanding how learners move from comprehension toward critical

engagement with texts. In this sense, the contribution of this paper lies not in redefining either RSI or critical literacy but in clarifying how these processes may serve broader educational purposes as the goals of reading expand. By viewing RSI as a pedagogical perspective rather than merely a collection of reading strategies, the present discussion provides a conceptual basis for understanding how teachers may support learners' critical engagement with texts in ways that contribute to the development of critical literacy.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The perspective proposed in this paper has implications for EFL reading instruction across different educational levels. Because the present discussion is conceptual rather than focused on a particular group of learners, the terms *teachers* and *learners* have been used broadly throughout the paper. In classroom practice, however, teachers need to consider learners' age, language proficiency, the texts they read, and the purposes of instruction when guiding them toward critical engagement. The amount and type of support learners need may, therefore, differ across primary, secondary, and tertiary EFL settings.

At the primary level, teachers may begin with accessible texts such as picture books and visual narratives and provide substantial support for both comprehension and critical inquiry. Questions about characters, events, and illustrations can first help learners construct textual meaning and then encourage them to notice different perspectives or consider how another character might understand the same situation. At the secondary level, literary and multimodal texts can provide opportunities for learners to examine textual evidence, compare interpretations, and consider how people, events, or social issues are represented. Teachers may initially model such questioning and gradually encourage learners to generate questions, justify their interpretations, and respond to alternative perspectives. At the tertiary level, learners may take greater responsibility for examining literary texts, media discourse, digital texts, or AI-mediated texts in relation to representation, identity, ideology, and social participation. Teacher guidance at this level may focus less on modeling individual questions and more on sustaining inquiry, encouraging evidence-based discussion, and helping learners critically reconsider their own interpretations.

These differences across educational levels concern primarily how teachers support critical engagement, rather than whether learners can engage in it. Comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy may all be part of reading instruction at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, although the texts, questions, and forms of teacher guidance will differ. Younger or less proficient learners may need more explicit modeling and support in connecting textual meaning with different perspectives, whereas more experienced learners may take greater responsibility for generating questions, evaluating interpretations, and sustaining critical inquiry. From an RSI perspective, teachers can build on familiar reading processes and gradually extend the purposes they serve while adjusting the degree of guidance to learners and classroom contexts.

To provide a more concrete illustration, the Appendix presents a classroom activity sheet for secondary-level EFL reading based on the picture-book example discussed earlier. It illustrates how strategic questioning may be oriented toward comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy in classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

Recent research has substantially broadened the scope of critical literacy in EFL by expanding the texts, issues, and literacy practices through which learners engage critically with the world. This pedagogical expansion calls for greater attention to how teachers support learners' critical engagement throughout reading instruction. Reconsidering RSI from this instructional perspective offers one way of addressing this question.

The present paper has not proposed new reading strategies or an alternative instructional model. Instead, it has offered a different way of interpreting established strategic and metacognitive processes within RSI. The central argument has been that these processes need not be confined to supporting comprehension alone. When instructional purposes broaden, familiar practices such as strategic questioning, metacognitive monitoring, reflection, inferencing, evaluation, and self-regulation may also support critical forms of thinking and engagement. Rather than requiring teachers to adopt fundamentally different reading practices, this perspective suggests that these established processes may be intentionally reoriented toward expanded educational goals through purposeful instructional guidance. In this sense, the contribution of RSI lies less in providing additional strategies than in offering pedagogical insights into how teachers may guide learners' movement toward critical engagement with texts.

The discussion presented here remains conceptual in nature. The orientations proposed should not be understood as

empirically validated descriptions of classroom learning, nor as a sequence through which learners necessarily progress. They illustrate how these established processes within RSI may contribute to critical thinking and critical literacy. Future research should, therefore, examine how these orientations are enacted in diverse EFL classroom practices. Such work may further refine the conceptual framework proposed here while informing instructional design, teacher education, and classroom practice across diverse EFL contexts.

The present discussion suggests that critical literacy and RSI have developed largely in parallel while emphasizing different aspects of EFL reading. Critical literacy has significantly expanded the educational purposes of EFL reading by encouraging learners to examine issues of representation, identity, ideology, and social participation (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012). Research on RSI has, in turn, generated a substantial body of pedagogical knowledge concerning how teachers support learners' engagement with texts through explicit instruction, scaffolding, metacognitive reflection, and the gradual transfer of responsibility (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Although these two traditions have developed along largely separate trajectories, their relationship has received relatively little conceptual attention. Considering these traditions together helps connect the expanding educational goals of critical literacy with this accumulated knowledge about how teachers support learners' engagement with texts.

Rather than asking what critical literacy instruction should include, this paper has examined how the pedagogical knowledge developed within the RSI tradition may help explain how teachers support learners' critical engagement with texts. Viewing RSI as a pedagogical perspective highlights that familiar strategic and metacognitive processes can serve broader educational purposes when teachers intentionally orient them toward critical engagement with texts. Rather than replacing existing approaches to critical literacy, this perspective provides a way of connecting the expanding educational goals of critical literacy with established pedagogical knowledge about reading instruction in EFL classrooms. Ultimately, this paper argues that familiar strategic and metacognitive processes can support critical literacy not because the processes themselves change, but because teachers intentionally orient them toward different educational purposes.

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Appendix

Illustrative Classroom Activity Sheet for Secondary-Level EFL Reading

Context

Second-year middle school EFL students with developing English proficiency

Text

A picture book depicting the transformation of an abandoned urban space into a community garden

Instructional focus

Using strategic questioning to support comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy

Learning purpose

To help learners construct an understanding of the text, examine and justify different interpretations, and consider how the story represents different perspectives and social issues.

Activity 1: Understanding the text

Read the story and discuss the following questions with a partner.

- What happened to the abandoned space?
 - How did the space change after the garden was created?
 - How did people in the community respond to these changes?
- Use details from the text and illustrations to support your answers.

Teacher guidance:

The teacher helps learners clarify key events and meanings and models how textual and visual information can be used to support an interpretation. Vocabulary or sentence prompts may be provided when needed.

Activity 2: Examining different interpretations

Discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.

- Why do you think the transformation of the space was important?
- What evidence in the story supports your interpretation?
- Could someone interpret the changes differently? Why?

Compare your interpretation with those of other group members. Explain what evidence supports your view and consider whether another interpretation is also possible.

Teacher guidance:

The teacher models questions that ask learners to move beyond identifying information toward examining evidence and alternative interpretations. Rather than providing a preferred interpretation, the teacher encourages learners to explain and reconsider their responses.

Activity 3: Examining perspectives and representation

Discuss the following questions with your group.

- Whose perspectives are represented in the story?
- Is there anyone whose perspective or voice is not represented?
- What does the story suggest about who is responsible for improving a community?
- Might people in different situations view the transformation of the space differently?

Choose one question and explain your group's response to the class. Use evidence from the story or illustrations where possible.

Teacher guidance:

The teacher extends learners' questioning toward perspectives, assumptions, and representation while providing support when the language or concepts become difficult. Learners are encouraged to build on one another's responses rather than search for a single correct answer.

Activity 4: Reflecting on your interpretation

After the discussion, respond briefly to the following questions.

- Did any classmate's idea make you reconsider your interpretation? How?
- What perspective did you notice that you had not considered before?
- What question about the story would you now like to ask?

Share one response with a partner or the class.

Teacher guidance:

The teacher encourages learners to reflect on how their interpretations developed through textual evidence and interaction with different perspectives. As learners become more able to generate questions and justify their responses, teacher support can be gradually reduced.

Language support, if needed

I think ____ because the text/picture shows ____.

Another interpretation might be ____.

The story mainly shows the perspective of ____.

The perspective of ____ may be missing.

I first thought ____, but now I think ____ because ____.

Note.

This activity sheet is intended as an illustration of how strategic questioning may be oriented toward different instructional purposes rather than as a fixed sequence for critical literacy instruction. The activities may overlap, and teachers may move between comprehension, critical thinking, and critical literacy according to learners' responses and classroom contexts.