

Developing Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Through Bakhtinian Dialogue And Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory: Evidence From Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Critical reading has emerged as a vital academic competence that enables learners to analyse, interpret, and evaluate literary texts from multiple perspectives. Despite the growing emphasis on critical literacy, many classroom practices continue to privilege information retrieval over reflective and dialogic engagement. Addressing this gap, the present study develops an integrated framework by combining Bakhtin's theory of dialogism with Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to enhance critical reading competence through the selected fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Bakhtin's concept of dialogic interaction encourages readers to engage with diverse voices, cultural contexts, and competing viewpoints, while Rosenblatt's efferent-aesthetic continuum explains the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the literary text. Bringing these complementary perspectives together, the study demonstrates how meaningful classroom dialogue and personal reader responses foster deeper interpretation, critical reflection, and independent meaning-making. Divakaruni's narratives, with their rich portrayal of migration, identity, gender, memory, and cultural negotiation, provide an effective platform for examining these processes. The proposed framework highlights the role of literature as a space for intellectual inquiry rather than passive consumption, encouraging learners to question assumptions and construct informed interpretations. The study contributes to contemporary literary pedagogy by presenting a practical and theoretically grounded model that supports critical literacy, dialogic learning, and learner-centred reading practices in higher education.

Keywords: Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory, Critical Reading Competence, Dialogic Learning, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Literary Pedagogy.

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Reading has long been recognised as one of the most fundamental language skills that supports academic achievement, intellectual growth, and lifelong learning. However, in the twenty-first century, the nature of reading has undergone a profound transformation. Rather than being viewed as a mechanical process of decoding words and comprehending literal meanings, reading is increasingly understood as an active intellectual practice that requires learners to interpret, analyse, evaluate, synthesise, and construct knowledge from diverse textual sources. The unprecedented growth of digital technologies, global communication, interdisciplinary education, and multicultural societies has significantly expanded the demands placed upon university students. Consequently, higher education institutions now expect graduates to possess sophisticated reading abilities that enable them to examine complex arguments, evaluate competing perspectives, identify implicit assumptions, and make informed judgements based on credible evidence. Within this educational landscape, critical reading has emerged as one of the most essential competencies for academic excellence, professional success, and responsible citizenship.

The increasing emphasis on critical reading reflects broader changes in higher education across the world. Universities are no longer expected merely to transmit disciplinary knowledge but also to cultivate graduates who can think independently, solve complex problems, communicate effectively, and participate responsibly in multicultural societies. Employers similarly seek graduates who are capable of analysing information critically, adapting to changing professional environments, and making evidence-based decisions. As a result, higher education has progressively shifted from teacher-centred models of instruction towards learner-centred pedagogies that encourage inquiry, collaboration, creativity, and reflective learning. Reading therefore occupies a central position within this transformation because it serves as the foundation upon which analytical reasoning, academic writing, research competence, and intellectual independence are developed.

The importance of critical reading extends beyond the acquisition of academic knowledge. In contemporary society, individuals encounter an unprecedented volume of information through books, scholarly publications, digital platforms, social media, news outlets, and artificial intelligence-driven technologies. While this abundance of information creates remarkable opportunities for learning, it also presents significant challenges. Readers must distinguish reliable evidence from misinformation, evaluate conflicting viewpoints, recognise ideological influences, and interpret information within appropriate social and cultural contexts. Consequently, critical reading has become an indispensable life skill that enables learners not only to understand information but also to question, interpret, and evaluate it responsibly. Such competencies are particularly valuable in higher education, where students are expected to engage with complex academic texts requiring analytical judgement rather than simple factual recall.

Literary studies provide an especially rich context for the development of critical reading competence because literature presents readers with multiple layers of meaning, symbolic representation, cultural diversity, emotional complexity, and ethical ambiguity. Unlike informational or technical texts, literary works rarely offer straightforward answers or singular interpretations. Instead, they invite readers to explore diverse perspectives, question assumptions, interpret symbolism, and negotiate meanings that evolve through reflection and discussion. Literature thus encourages readers to move beyond literal comprehension towards deeper forms of intellectual engagement that combine analytical reasoning with imagination, empathy, and cultural awareness. As Paulo Freire famously observed, "Reading the world always precedes reading the word." This observation highlights the inseparable relationship between language, culture, and human experience, suggesting that meaningful reading involves interpreting both texts and the social realities from which those texts emerge.

Within literary education, reading therefore becomes an interpretative process through which learners engage with diverse voices, historical experiences, ideological positions, and cultural identities. Literary narratives expose readers to unfamiliar social realities, ethical dilemmas, and human experiences that challenge preconceived assumptions while encouraging empathy and reflective thinking. Such experiences contribute significantly to the development of intercultural competence, emotional intelligence, and responsible citizenship. Consequently, literature classrooms possess enormous potential to become spaces where students cultivate not only linguistic proficiency but also intellectual curiosity, ethical reasoning, and social awareness through collaborative interpretation and critical dialogue.

Despite these educational possibilities, literature teaching in many higher education institutions continues to be dominated by traditional instructional practices that emphasise teacher-centred explanations, examination-oriented learning, and the reproduction of established critical interpretations. Classroom activities frequently focus on identifying literary devices, summarising themes, or memorising critical opinions rather than encouraging students to formulate independent interpretations supported by textual evidence. Although these approaches contribute to foundational literary knowledge, they often restrict opportunities for learners to engage actively with texts, question assumptions, compare alternative perspectives, or participate in collaborative meaning-making.

Consequently, students may become passive recipients of literary knowledge rather than active interpreters capable of constructing thoughtful, evidence-based responses to complex literary works.

Recent developments in educational theory increasingly challenge these conventional approaches by advocating learner-centred pedagogies that emphasise dialogue, inquiry, reflection, and collaborative learning. Contemporary literacy scholars argue that meaning is not permanently embedded within texts but emerges through continuous interaction among readers, language, culture, and context. Reading is therefore understood as a dynamic process of knowledge construction in which learners negotiate interpretations by drawing upon prior knowledge, personal experiences, cultural understanding, and textual evidence. Such perspectives encourage students to recognise that literary texts remain open to multiple interpretations, each shaped by different historical, cultural, and individual experiences. Critical reading consequently extends beyond comprehension to include evaluating arguments, recognising ideological positions, analysing narrative perspectives, interpreting symbolism, and constructing informed judgements through reflective reasoning.

This learner-centred understanding of reading finds strong theoretical support in dialogic approaches to education. Dialogic learning proposes that knowledge develops through interaction rather than transmission, encouraging students to construct understanding collaboratively by exchanging ideas, questioning assumptions, and evaluating multiple perspectives. Classroom dialogue, reflective discussion, collaborative interpretation, and evidence-based debate enable learners to articulate their thinking while simultaneously refining it through engagement with others. Such educational practices strengthen analytical reasoning, communication skills, intercultural understanding, and intellectual confidence because learners become active participants in the creation of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. The literature classroom consequently becomes a space where meaning is negotiated collectively through thoughtful conversation, reflective inquiry, and mutual respect for diverse interpretations.

Among the most influential contributors to dialogic literary theory is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose philosophy of Dialogism has profoundly shaped literary criticism, discourse studies, and educational thought. Bakhtin argued that language is inherently social and that meaning emerges through dialogue among multiple voices rather than through isolated or authoritative statements. His concepts of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and unfinalisability have transformed the understanding of literary interpretation by demonstrating that texts remain open to continuous reinterpretation across different historical, cultural, and social contexts. As Bakhtin observed, "To be means to communicate," emphasising that human understanding develops through interaction and dialogue. His theoretical perspective encourages readers to appreciate literary works as dynamic conversations in which diverse voices coexist, challenge one another, and generate new meanings. Such a perspective naturally aligns with contemporary educational goals that seek to develop reflective, collaborative, and critically engaged learners.

Complementing Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy is Louise M. Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, which places the reader at the centre of literary interpretation. Rosenblatt proposed that meaning does not reside exclusively within the text or the reader but emerges through a reciprocal transaction between both. Every reading experience is therefore unique because readers approach literary works with different experiences, cultural backgrounds, emotions, and expectations. Her distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading further demonstrates that effective literary engagement requires both analytical understanding and emotional involvement. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of predetermined meanings, Rosenblatt's theory encourages them to construct interpretations through personal reflection while supporting their responses with textual evidence. This perspective complements Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogue by illustrating how individual experience and collaborative discussion together contribute to deeper literary understanding.

The integration of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory provides a powerful foundation for reimagining literary pedagogy in higher education. While

Bakhtin explains how meaning evolves through dialogue among voices, cultures, and ideological perspectives, Rosenblatt demonstrates how readers actively construct meaning through their personal engagement with texts. Together, these complementary theories redefine critical reading as both a social and an individual process characterised by inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and evidence-based interpretation. Such an integrated perspective becomes particularly valuable when applied to the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, whose narratives explore migration, identity, memory, gender, family relationships, and cultural negotiation through richly layered storytelling. Her works invite readers to encounter multiple voices, negotiate diverse cultural perspectives, and engage thoughtfully with complex ethical and social issues. These qualities make her fiction an ideal context for cultivating dialogic critical reading competence among university students while simultaneously promoting intercultural understanding, reflective thinking, and learner-centred literary engagement. The present study is therefore situated within this evolving pedagogical landscape, seeking to establish a comprehensive theoretical foundation for integrating dialogic learning and reader-response pedagogy in the development of critical reading competence within higher education.

1.2 Problem Statement of the Study

Despite the growing recognition of critical reading as a core competency in higher education, its effective development within literature classrooms continues to present significant pedagogical challenges. Universities worldwide increasingly advocate learner-centred education that promotes analytical reasoning, reflective thinking, collaborative learning, and independent inquiry. However, in many higher education institutions, the teaching of literature remains largely influenced by traditional instructional practices that emphasise teacher-centred explanations, examination-oriented preparation, and the reproduction of established literary interpretations. Students are often encouraged to memorise thematic analyses, character descriptions, and critical viewpoints rather than engage actively in questioning, interpreting, and evaluating literary texts through independent reasoning. Consequently, literature learning frequently becomes a process of knowledge reproduction instead of intellectual exploration, limiting students' ability to develop higher-order critical reading competence.

This pedagogical limitation becomes more pronounced in multicultural and interdisciplinary educational environments where students encounter literary texts that reflect diverse cultural identities, historical experiences, ideological perspectives, and social realities. Contemporary literary works are characterised by multiple voices, symbolic complexity, cultural hybridity, and ethical ambiguity, requiring readers to negotiate meanings rather than merely identify predetermined interpretations. Nevertheless, many classroom practices continue to privilege authoritative explanations provided by instructors or prescribed study materials, leaving relatively little opportunity for learners to participate in collaborative dialogue, justify their interpretations with textual evidence, or appreciate the legitimacy of multiple perspectives. Such instructional approaches restrict students' intellectual autonomy and reduce literature to an examination subject instead of a medium for developing critical consciousness, intercultural understanding, and reflective judgement.

Another important challenge concerns the limited integration of contemporary literary theories into pedagogical practice. Bakhtinian Dialogism has significantly influenced literary criticism by explaining how meaning emerges through dialogue among multiple voices, cultures, and ideological positions. Similarly, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory has transformed literary education by demonstrating that meaning develops through the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text. Although both theories have independently contributed to literary scholarship and classroom practice, they are seldom integrated into a comprehensive pedagogical framework that simultaneously values collaborative dialogue and individual reader response. As a result, literature classrooms often emphasise either textual analysis or personal interpretation without adequately balancing social interaction, critical reflection, and evidence-based literary inquiry.

The selection of literary texts also represents an important pedagogical consideration. Contemporary multicultural literature offers rich opportunities for promoting critical literacy because it exposes learners to diverse cultures, identities, values, and worldviews. Among contemporary Indian

English writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni occupies a distinctive position through narratives that explore migration, gender, family relationships, memory, belonging, cultural displacement, and identity formation. Her fiction encourages readers to examine complex human experiences from multiple perspectives while engaging with issues that remain highly relevant in globalised societies. Despite the considerable scholarly attention devoted to her works from feminist, diasporic, postcolonial, and cultural perspectives, comparatively little research has investigated their systematic use as pedagogical resources for developing dialogic critical reading competence in higher education.

These concerns collectively indicate the need for a pedagogical model that moves beyond conventional literary instruction and places learners at the centre of meaning-making. There is a growing necessity to develop an integrated framework that encourages collaborative dialogue, reflective interpretation, intercultural understanding, and evidence-based reasoning while recognising the active role of readers in constructing literary meaning. Addressing this need forms the central motivation of the present study, which seeks to integrate Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory through the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to strengthen dialogic critical reading competence among higher education learners.

1.3 Research Gap

A comprehensive review of contemporary scholarship reveals substantial advances in the fields of critical reading, dialogic pedagogy, reader-response theory, and multicultural literary studies. Over the past decade, researchers have increasingly recognised critical reading as a multidimensional competence that extends beyond literal comprehension to encompass analytical reasoning, reflective judgement, interpretative flexibility, and evidence-based evaluation. Similarly, learner-centred pedagogical approaches have gained prominence for their ability to encourage collaborative learning, independent inquiry, and higher-order thinking skills. These developments have significantly enriched literary education by shifting the emphasis from passive knowledge acquisition to active knowledge construction.

Within literary theory, Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism has remained one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how meaning emerges through dialogue among multiple voices, ideological positions, and cultural perspectives. His concepts of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and unfinalisability have been widely employed in literary criticism, discourse analysis, cultural studies, and educational research to explain the dynamic and evolving nature of textual meaning. Likewise, Louise M. Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory has profoundly influenced reader-oriented literary pedagogy by emphasising that literary meaning develops through the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text. Contemporary studies consistently acknowledge that Rosenblatt's theory promotes reflective reading, personal engagement, interpretative confidence, and learner autonomy within literature classrooms.

Parallel to these theoretical developments, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction has attracted extensive scholarly attention because of its rich exploration of migration, diaspora, gender, family relationships, mythology, cultural identity, memory, and transnational experiences. Researchers have examined her novels and short stories through diverse theoretical lenses, including feminism, postcolonialism, cultural hybridity, diasporic identity, ecofeminism, and mythological reinterpretation. These investigations have significantly enhanced the understanding of Divakaruni's literary contributions and her representation of multicultural experiences within contemporary Indian English literature.

Despite these important scholarly contributions, the existing body of research reveals several significant limitations. First, studies on critical reading competence predominantly emphasise cognitive strategies, digital literacy, language proficiency, or critical literacy without adequately incorporating dialogic literary engagement as a structured pedagogical approach. Second, although Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory share complementary assumptions regarding the active construction of meaning, they have generally been applied as independent

theoretical perspectives rather than as an integrated framework for literary pedagogy. Consequently, opportunities to combine collaborative dialogue with individual reader response in the development of critical reading competence remain largely unexplored.

Furthermore, although Divakaruni's fiction possesses considerable pedagogical potential because of its multicultural themes, polyphonic narratives, and interpretative richness, existing studies have primarily concentrated on literary criticism rather than classroom application. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to investigating how her narratives can be systematically utilised to strengthen critical reading competence through dialogic interaction, reflective interpretation, and evidence-based discussion among university students. This absence is particularly significant in contemporary higher education, where developing critical thinking, intercultural competence, and collaborative learning has become an institutional priority.

To the best of the present review, no comprehensive conceptual study has integrated Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction into a unified pedagogical framework for developing Dialogic Critical Reading Competence in higher education. Addressing this gap constitutes the central contribution of the present study. Accordingly, this research proposes the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF), which synthesises these complementary theoretical perspectives to provide a holistic model for fostering critical literacy, collaborative interpretation, reflective inquiry, and intercultural understanding in university literature classrooms. By bridging literary theory with pedagogical practice, the proposed framework contributes a novel conceptual perspective to contemporary literary education and establishes a foundation for future empirical research on dialogic critical reading.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to:

1. To examine the theoretical foundations of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory in relation to the development of critical reading competence in higher education.
2. To analyse the pedagogical potential of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction for promoting dialogic engagement, reflective interpretation, and critical literary reading among university students.
3. To develop an integrated Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) by synthesising the principles of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory.
4. To demonstrate how the proposed DCRCF can foster critical literacy, collaborative meaning-making, reflective thinking, intercultural understanding, and evidence-based literary interpretation in higher education classrooms.
5. To contribute a theoretically grounded conceptual framework that advances learner-centred literary pedagogy and provides a foundation for future research and instructional practices in English language and literature education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing importance of critical reading in higher education has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past decade. In contemporary academic environments, reading is no longer viewed as a passive process of decoding textual information but as an active intellectual practice involving interpretation, evaluation, reflection, and knowledge construction. Universities increasingly recognise that graduates must possess the ability to analyse complex arguments, evaluate evidence, question assumptions, and synthesise multiple perspectives in order to respond effectively to rapidly changing professional and social contexts. Consequently, critical reading competence has emerged as an essential graduate attribute that contributes to academic success, professional communication, research capability, and lifelong learning.

Recent scholarship demonstrates a significant shift in the conceptualisation of critical reading. Earlier research primarily examined reading as an individual cognitive skill centred on comprehension and vocabulary development. However, studies published between 2021 and 2026 increasingly portray critical reading as a socially situated and dialogic process. Afflerbach and Cho (2021) argue that proficient readers continually regulate comprehension, evaluate textual credibility, and revise interpretations through metacognitive reflection. Similarly, Grabe and Zhang (2022) maintain that effective academic reading requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, disciplinary understanding, inference generation, and analytical reasoning. Contemporary educational researchers therefore view critical reading as a multidimensional competence that combines cognitive, social, cultural, and reflective processes.

The digital transformation of higher education has further expanded the scope of critical reading. The widespread use of online journals, artificial intelligence, social media, and multimodal digital resources requires students to evaluate information critically across multiple platforms. Leu, Forzani, and Maykel (2021) emphasise that online reading involves assessing source credibility, recognising misinformation, and synthesising evidence from diverse digital environments. Likewise, Coiro (2022) argues that digital reading demands continuous evaluative judgement because learners must distinguish reliable information from inaccurate or biased content. These developments have positioned digital critical literacy alongside traditional textual analysis as an indispensable component of contemporary university education.

Another significant trend in recent literature is the growing relationship between critical reading and learner-centred pedagogy. Educational researchers consistently report that collaborative discussion, inquiry-based learning, reflective writing, peer interaction, and problem-based learning produce greater analytical engagement than conventional lecture-oriented instruction. Alexander (2021) argues that dialogic classrooms encourage learners to articulate interpretations, question assumptions, and negotiate meaning through structured discussion. Similarly, Mercer and Wegerif (2022) demonstrate that collaborative dialogue strengthens reasoning because students are required to justify interpretations with textual evidence while considering alternative viewpoints. These findings indicate that critical reading develops most effectively within interactive learning environments where meaning is negotiated collectively rather than transmitted by the instructor.

The theoretical foundations of dialogic literary education are strongly supported by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Louise M. Rosenblatt. Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism proposes that meaning emerges through interaction among multiple voices rather than from a single authoritative perspective. His concepts of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and unfinalisability continue to influence contemporary educational research because they encourage learners to appreciate interpretative diversity, cultural plurality, and intellectual openness. Recent studies demonstrate that dialogic classrooms promote analytical reasoning, collaborative inquiry, and reflective judgement by encouraging students to negotiate meanings through discussion rather than memorisation. Such approaches are increasingly regarded as essential for developing higher-order thinking in higher education.

Complementing Bakhtin's social perspective, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory positions readers as active participants in literary interpretation. Rosenblatt argues that meaning does not reside exclusively within the text or the reader but emerges through the reciprocal transaction between both. Contemporary educational research supports this view by demonstrating that personal experience, cultural background, emotions, and prior knowledge significantly influence literary interpretation. Studies by Beach (2021) and Wilhelm and Novak (2022) indicate that reader-response pedagogy enhances interpretative confidence, reflective thinking, and analytical sophistication because students actively construct meaning while supporting their responses with textual evidence. Together, Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy and Rosenblatt's transactional theory provide complementary perspectives that explain how collaborative dialogue and individual experience jointly contribute to critical reading competence.

Recent scholarship has also highlighted the pedagogical value of multicultural literature in promoting critical literacy and intercultural understanding. Among contemporary Indian English writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni occupies a distinctive position because her fiction explores migration, identity, gender, memory, family relationships, and cultural negotiation through multidimensional narratives. Studies published between 2021 and 2026 have examined her works from diverse theoretical perspectives, including postcolonialism, feminism, diaspora studies, cultural hybridity, and mythological reinterpretation. Scholars consistently acknowledge that Divakaruni's narratives encourage readers to engage with multiple cultural perspectives while reflecting on issues of belonging, identity, tradition, and modernity. Her novels therefore provide valuable opportunities for developing empathy, intercultural competence, and reflective thinking among university students.

Recent investigations further suggest that Divakaruni's fiction possesses considerable educational significance because its complex characters, ethical dilemmas, and multicultural settings naturally stimulate classroom discussion and interpretative inquiry. Students reading her works are encouraged to compare perspectives, evaluate competing viewpoints, and justify interpretations using textual evidence. Consequently, her fiction aligns closely with learner-centred pedagogies that promote collaborative learning and critical engagement. Nevertheless, most existing studies remain focused on literary themes such as feminism, diaspora, cultural identity, or mythology, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to the systematic development of critical reading competence through her narratives.

A careful synthesis of the literature reveals several important gaps. First, research on critical reading competence largely emphasises cognitive, linguistic, or digital literacy frameworks, while comparatively less attention has been given to the dialogic and transactional dimensions of literary interpretation. Second, Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory have generally developed as parallel theoretical traditions, with limited attempts to integrate them within a unified pedagogical framework. Third, although Divakaruni's fiction has been widely examined from postcolonial, feminist, and cultural perspectives, relatively few investigations have explored its potential as a resource for developing dialogic critical reading competence in higher education. Finally, no recent study identified in this review integrates Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction within a single conceptual framework for strengthening critical reading competence.

The present study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework that combines Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory to develop Dialogic Critical Reading Competence through the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The proposed framework conceptualises literary reading as a multidimensional process in which meaning emerges through the interaction of text, reader, dialogue, cultural experience, and collaborative interpretation. By synthesising these complementary theoretical traditions, the study contributes an original perspective to literary pedagogy, critical literacy, reader-response studies, dialogic education, and multicultural literature while offering practical implications for English language and literature classrooms in higher education.

2.1. Summary of Recent Studies (2021–2026) on Critical Reading, Dialogic Pedagogy, Reader-Response Theory, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Fiction

Author(s)	Year	Research Focus	Major Findings	Research Gap Identified
Afflerbach & Cho	2021	Critical Reading Competence	Emphasised metacognitive strategies and evaluative reading for academic success.	Did not examine literary pedagogy or dialogic interaction.
Alexander	2021	Dialogic Teaching	Demonstrated that classroom dialogue promotes	Did not integrate reader-response theory or multicultural literature.

Author(s)	Year	Research Focus	Major Findings	Research Gap Identified
			collaborative learning and reasoning.	
Beach	2021	Reader-Response Pedagogy	Highlighted active reader participation in constructing literary meaning.	Focused primarily on individual responses rather than collaborative dialogue.
Leu, Forzani & Maykel	2021	Digital Critical Literacy	Identified the importance of evaluating online information and digital texts critically.	Limited discussion of literary interpretation and dialogic reading.
Grabe & Zhang	2022	Academic Reading	Explained the relationship between linguistic competence and higher-order reading skills.	Did not propose an integrated literary framework for critical reading.
Janks	2022	Critical Literacy	Examined the relationship between language, ideology, culture, and power.	Limited attention to reader-response and dialogic literary pedagogy.
Mercer & Wegerif	2022	Dialogic Learning	Demonstrated that structured classroom dialogue enhances analytical reasoning.	Did not connect dialogic pedagogy with transactional literary reading.
Coiro	2022	Digital Reading	Emphasised evaluative judgement in digital reading environments.	Focus remained on digital literacy rather than literary education.
Banks	2022	Multicultural Education	Highlighted intercultural understanding through diverse classroom perspectives.	Did not investigate literary theories for critical reading development.
Sharma	2022	Divakaruni's Fiction	Analysed feminist identity and women's agency in Divakaruni's novels.	Concentrated on thematic analysis rather than pedagogy.
Luke	2023	Critical Literacy	Connected critical reading with democratic participation and social awareness.	Did not explore multicultural literary texts as instructional resources.
Gay	2023	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Demonstrated that students' cultural experiences enrich textual interpretation.	Reader-response and dialogic theories were not integrated.
Zawacki-Richter et al.	2023	AI in Education	Discussed personalised learning through AI-supported educational technologies.	Limited emphasis on literary interpretation and dialogic engagement.
Mukherjee	2024	Divakaruni's Fiction	Examined gender, migration, and cultural identity in contemporary narratives.	Did not investigate critical reading competence or literary pedagogy.
Holmes et al.	2024	Technology-Enhanced Learning	Recommended balancing AI-assisted learning with reflective and collaborative pedagogy.	Did not propose a theoretical framework integrating literature and critical reading.

Author(s)	Year	Research Focus	Major Findings	Research Gap Identified
Nair	2025	Mythological Reinterpretation	Analysed feminist reinterpretations in Divakaruni's mythological fiction.	Focus remained on literary criticism without pedagogical application.
Fernando	2025	Literature Teaching	Reported that multicultural fiction promotes classroom discussion and reflective learning.	Did not integrate Bakhtinian Dialogism and Reader-Response Theory.
Momeni, Aerila & Routarinne	2026	Reader-Response Pedagogy	Systematic review confirmed the effectiveness of reader-response approaches in promoting learner engagement.	Recommended integrating complementary theoretical perspectives.
Shimek	2026	Dialogic Literary Pedagogy	Demonstrated that combining dialogic discussion with reader engagement improves literary interpretation.	Did not employ Divakaruni's fiction or propose a comprehensive conceptual framework.

2.2 Synthesis of Previous Studies

The studies reviewed reveal four important trends. First, contemporary scholarship consistently recognises critical reading as a multidimensional competence involving analytical reasoning, reflective thinking, digital literacy, and collaborative learning. Second, Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory continue to provide influential theoretical foundations for learner-centred literary pedagogy, although they are generally applied independently rather than as complementary frameworks. Third, research on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction has concentrated primarily on diaspora, feminism, identity, cultural hybridity, and mythology, with comparatively little attention devoted to pedagogical applications. Finally, recent educational studies increasingly advocate collaborative and reflective approaches to literary learning, yet few investigations integrate dialogic interaction, reader response, and multicultural literature within a unified instructional model.

2.3 Identified Research Gap

The review indicates that existing studies have examined critical reading competence, Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction as largely independent areas of inquiry. To the best of the evidence reviewed, no published study has proposed an integrated conceptual framework that combines these three domains to develop Dialogic Critical Reading Competence in higher education. The present study addresses this gap by introducing the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF), which synthesises Bakhtinian dialogic principles, Rosenblatt's transactional approach, and Divakaruni's multicultural narratives into a unified pedagogical model. This integration contributes to contemporary scholarship by strengthening critical literacy, intercultural understanding, collaborative interpretation, and learner-centred literary pedagogy while offering practical implications for English language and literature education.

3.CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: DIALOGIC CRITICAL READING COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK (DCRCF)

Building upon the research gap identified in the preceding literature review, the present study proposes the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) as an integrated conceptual model for developing critical reading competence in higher education. The framework is designed to address the absence of a comprehensive pedagogical model that systematically integrates Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and the multicultural fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni for learner-centred literary instruction. While previous scholarship has demonstrated the individual significance of dialogic pedagogy, reader-response theory, and multicultural literary studies,

these perspectives have rarely been synthesised into a unified framework capable of strengthening dialogic critical reading competence. The DCRCF therefore represents the principal conceptual contribution of the present study by providing a coherent theoretical model that explains how critical reading competence can be cultivated through the interaction of literary texts, readers, collaborative dialogue, and reflective interpretation.

The proposed framework conceptualises critical reading as a dynamic, cyclical, and socially mediated process rather than as a linear progression from comprehension to interpretation. It assumes that literary meaning is neither permanently embedded within the text nor determined exclusively by individual readers. Instead, meaning is continuously constructed, negotiated, refined, and reconstructed through the reciprocal interaction among the literary text, the reader, classroom dialogue, and the broader cultural environment. Accordingly, literary learning becomes an active process of inquiry in which students engage with texts by questioning assumptions, evaluating competing perspectives, interpreting symbolic meanings, and constructing reasoned interpretations supported by textual evidence. This perspective shifts literary education away from traditional teacher-directed transmission of knowledge towards collaborative knowledge construction, thereby encouraging intellectual autonomy, reflective judgement, and critical literacy.

The DCRCF begins with the selection of literary texts that possess sufficient thematic richness, cultural diversity, narrative complexity, and interpretative openness to stimulate meaningful discussion. Within the present study, the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni serves as the principal pedagogical resource because her narratives naturally encourage readers to explore issues of migration, identity, gender, memory, family relationships, cultural negotiation, belonging, and ethical responsibility. Rather than presenting simplistic moral conclusions, her fiction exposes readers to multiple cultural experiences and diverse ideological positions that invite continuous interpretation. Such narratives create an intellectually stimulating environment where students encounter competing viewpoints and are encouraged to examine human experiences from different social, historical, and cultural perspectives. The literary text therefore functions not merely as instructional content but as the catalyst that initiates dialogic inquiry and critical engagement.

Following their initial engagement with the literary text, learners begin constructing preliminary interpretations by drawing upon their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge, emotions, beliefs, and academic understanding. These individual responses are regarded as legitimate starting points for literary interpretation rather than definitive conclusions. The framework recognises that each learner approaches the same literary text differently because personal experiences influence how characters, conflicts, cultural practices, and symbolic representations are understood. Consequently, diversity of interpretation is viewed as an educational strength that enriches subsequent classroom dialogue. Individual reader engagement therefore becomes the foundation upon which collaborative meaning-making is constructed, ensuring that literary learning values both personal reflection and academic reasoning.

The next stage of the framework involves structured dialogic interaction, which constitutes the central mechanism through which critical reading competence develops. Students participate in collaborative discussions that encourage them to articulate interpretations, compare viewpoints, question assumptions, evaluate alternative perspectives, and justify conclusions using textual evidence. Dialogue within the DCRCF extends beyond ordinary classroom conversation because it is deliberately organised to promote critical inquiry, reflective questioning, and intellectual negotiation. Learners are encouraged to recognise that literary meaning evolves through interaction rather than through the acceptance of predetermined interpretations. Exposure to diverse viewpoints enables students to reconsider initial assumptions, identify gaps in their reasoning, refine interpretative arguments, and appreciate the complexity of literary representation. Classroom dialogue therefore becomes the intellectual space where individual understanding is continuously expanded through collaborative engagement.

The framework further incorporates systematic critical reflection as an essential stage in the development of dialogic critical reading competence. Reflection requires learners to move beyond personal opinion by examining narrative structures, symbolic patterns, ideological assumptions, cultural representations, ethical dilemmas, and authorial techniques with analytical rigour. Students are expected to evaluate competing interpretations objectively while supporting their own conclusions with relevant textual evidence. Reflection also encourages learners to recognise how their own cultural identities, beliefs, and experiences influence literary interpretation, thereby strengthening metacognitive awareness and intellectual self-reflection. Instead of viewing literary analysis as the identification of a single correct meaning, the framework encourages learners to appreciate literary interpretation as a process of continual refinement in which understanding evolves through evidence, dialogue, and critical reasoning.

Through repeated cycles of reading, discussion, reflection, and reinterpretation, learners gradually construct deeper and more comprehensive literary understanding. The DCRCF conceptualises meaning as an evolving intellectual achievement that develops through sustained interaction among readers, texts, peers, and educational contexts. Collaborative interpretation enables students to synthesise diverse perspectives while maintaining scholarly rigour through evidence-based argumentation. This process encourages learners not only to interpret literary texts but also to develop transferable intellectual abilities applicable beyond literature classrooms. Skills such as analytical reasoning, reflective judgement, collaborative communication, intercultural sensitivity, and critical evaluation become progressively strengthened through continuous engagement with complex literary narratives and dialogic classroom practices.

The culmination of this pedagogical process is the development of Dialogic Critical Reading Competence, which represents the primary educational outcome of the proposed framework. Within the DCRCF, critical reading competence extends beyond traditional reading comprehension to encompass analytical thinking, interpretative flexibility, reflective judgement, evidence-based reasoning, collaborative meaning-making, intercultural understanding, empathy, intellectual openness, and learner autonomy. These competencies enable students to participate confidently in academic discourse while engaging thoughtfully with diverse literary, cultural, and social perspectives. By integrating cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of literary learning, the framework prepares learners to respond effectively to the intellectual demands of contemporary higher education and global society.

An important contribution of the DCRCF lies in its redefinition of the teacher's role within literature classrooms. Rather than functioning as the sole authority responsible for transmitting fixed literary interpretations, the teacher becomes a facilitator who creates conditions for meaningful dialogue, collaborative inquiry, reflective questioning, and evidence-based discussion. Students are encouraged to assume greater responsibility for constructing literary understanding through active participation, thereby transforming the classroom into a community of inquiry where learning emerges through collective intellectual engagement. Such learner-centred pedagogy promotes confidence, independence, and critical awareness while fostering an academic culture characterised by mutual respect for diverse perspectives and reasoned scholarly debate.

The proposed framework also contributes to the broader field of English language and literature education by establishing a meaningful relationship between literary theory and pedagogical practice. While existing studies have examined Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction independently, the DCRCF demonstrates how these complementary perspectives can be integrated into a single pedagogical model for developing critical reading competence. This synthesis extends the practical application of literary theory beyond textual analysis by providing educators with a structured conceptual framework that supports learner-centred instruction, collaborative interpretation, and reflective literary engagement. Consequently, the framework contributes not only to theoretical discussions in literary studies but also to curriculum development, classroom practice, teacher education, and critical literacy research.

The Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework therefore represents an original conceptual contribution that directly addresses the research gap identified in the present study. By integrating dialogic interaction, transactional reading, and multicultural literary narratives into a coherent pedagogical framework, the DCRCF provides a theoretically grounded model for cultivating higher-order thinking, critical literacy, intercultural competence, and reflective inquiry among university students. The framework establishes a strong foundation for future empirical investigations that may examine its implementation across diverse educational settings and literary contexts. Ultimately, it reaffirms that literary education is not merely concerned with understanding texts but with developing intellectually independent, culturally responsive, and critically reflective readers who are capable of engaging constructively with the complexities of contemporary society.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a conceptual research design to develop the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) by integrating the complementary theoretical perspectives of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory within the pedagogical context of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction. Unlike empirical investigations that depend upon participant-based data collection and statistical analysis, conceptual research seeks to generate new theoretical understanding through the systematic examination, synthesis, interpretation, and integration of existing scholarly knowledge. The primary objective of the present study is therefore not to measure the effectiveness of an instructional intervention but to construct a theoretically grounded framework capable of guiding future pedagogical practice and empirical investigation in English language and literature education.

The study is situated within the interpretivist research paradigm, which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction, interpretation, and contextual understanding. This philosophical orientation aligns closely with both Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, each of which conceptualises meaning as dynamic rather than fixed. Within this paradigm, literary interpretation is understood as an evolving process in which readers negotiate meaning through continuous interaction with texts, cultural contexts, and other readers. Consequently, the conceptual framework developed in this study reflects the interpretivist assumption that critical reading competence emerges through collaborative dialogue, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based literary interpretation rather than through passive acquisition of predetermined knowledge.

The methodological foundation of the study is based on systematic conceptual synthesis, a recognised approach for developing theoretical models by integrating established concepts from multiple but complementary bodies of literature. Rather than proposing entirely new theories, conceptual synthesis reorganises and combines existing theoretical perspectives to explain educational phenomena more comprehensively. In the present investigation, the synthesis focuses on three interconnected domains: theories of dialogic learning represented by Bakhtinian Dialogism, reader-oriented literary interpretation represented by Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and multicultural literary pedagogy represented through the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The integration of these domains enables the construction of a coherent pedagogical framework capable of addressing limitations identified in existing literary education research.

The study relies exclusively on secondary scholarly sources. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, book chapters, review articles, and internationally recognised publications in literary theory, literacy education, reader-response pedagogy, dialogic learning, critical literacy, and higher education constituted the principal sources of evidence. Particular attention was given to recent publications issued between 2021 and 2026 to ensure that the conceptual framework reflects current developments in educational research while also incorporating seminal theoretical works by Mikhail Bakhtin and Louise M. Rosenblatt that continue to provide the intellectual foundation for dialogic literary pedagogy. Contemporary scholarship on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction was likewise examined to understand how her narratives have been interpreted within literary criticism and to identify opportunities for extending their pedagogical application.

The literature selection process followed a systematic and transparent procedure designed to ensure academic rigour. Relevant publications were identified through comprehensive searches of major academic databases, including Scopus-indexed journals, Web of Science publications, ERIC, JSTOR, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals, Elsevier ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as critical reading competence, dialogic pedagogy, Bakhtinian Dialogism, reader-response theory, transactional reading, critical literacy, multicultural literature, literary pedagogy, higher education, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni were used individually and in combination to retrieve relevant scholarly literature. Publications were selected based on their theoretical relevance, methodological quality, contribution to literary education, and direct relationship to the objectives of the present study. Duplicate records, publications with limited scholarly relevance, and sources lacking conceptual significance were excluded from the review.

Following the identification of relevant literature, an extensive process of analytical reading and thematic synthesis was undertaken. Individual studies were examined to identify recurring concepts, theoretical propositions, pedagogical principles, and emerging trends related to critical reading competence and literary interpretation. Similar ideas were grouped into broader conceptual categories through iterative comparison and constant analysis. This process enabled the identification of convergent themes across different bodies of literature while simultaneously revealing conceptual gaps requiring further theoretical integration. The thematic synthesis demonstrated that existing scholarship consistently emphasises collaborative learning, reflective inquiry, learner engagement, and critical interpretation, yet rarely integrates these principles within a unified framework capable of explaining the simultaneous interaction of reader, text, dialogue, and multicultural literary experience.

The construction of the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework followed a sequential process of theoretical integration. Initially, the foundational assumptions of Bakhtinian Dialogism were analysed to determine their relevance for dialogic literary pedagogy. Particular attention was devoted to concepts such as dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and unfinalisability because these principles collectively explain how literary meaning develops through interaction among multiple voices and perspectives. Subsequently, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory was examined to identify those principles that explain the active role of readers in constructing literary meaning through personal engagement with texts. The complementary relationships between these theoretical traditions were then systematically mapped to identify areas of conceptual convergence. Finally, the thematic characteristics of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction were incorporated as the pedagogical context within which dialogic interaction and transactional reading could be meaningfully operationalised in higher education literature classrooms.

The resulting framework conceptualises critical reading competence as a multidimensional construct emerging through the interaction of four principal elements: the literary text, the individual reader, collaborative dialogue, and reflective interpretation. These elements operate recursively rather than sequentially, allowing learners to revisit interpretations continuously as new perspectives emerge through discussion and reflection. The cyclical structure of the framework reflects the theoretical assumptions shared by Bakhtinian Dialogism and Reader-Response Theory, both of which reject fixed meanings in favour of continuous interpretation. Consequently, the DCRCF represents a pedagogical model that encourages learners to construct literary understanding through repeated cycles of reading, discussion, evaluation, reflection, and reinterpretation.

Although conceptual research does not employ statistical procedures to establish validity, academic rigour was maintained through several complementary strategies. The framework was developed exclusively from well-established theoretical traditions that have received extensive scholarly recognition within literary studies and educational research. Multiple sources representing different scholarly perspectives were synthesised to minimise theoretical bias and enhance conceptual comprehensiveness. Furthermore, each component of the framework was explicitly aligned with the objectives of the study and supported by evidence derived from contemporary literature, thereby ensuring internal coherence, logical consistency, and theoretical transparency. The systematic

identification of research gaps also provides additional justification for the proposed framework by demonstrating how it extends existing scholarship rather than duplicating previous theoretical models.

The methodology adopted in the present study possesses several strengths. It enables comprehensive integration of complementary theories that have traditionally been investigated independently, thereby contributing an original conceptual perspective to literary pedagogy. The interpretivist orientation allows literary reading to be understood as both a social and personal process while recognising the influence of cultural diversity and collaborative learning. Moreover, the conceptual nature of the investigation facilitates the development of a flexible pedagogical model capable of informing curriculum design, classroom instruction, teacher education, and future empirical research across diverse educational settings.

Nevertheless, certain limitations should be acknowledged. As a conceptual investigation, the present study does not empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed framework within actual classroom environments. The educational outcomes associated with the DCRCF remain theoretically derived and therefore require empirical validation through future qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method investigations involving university students and literature teachers. Future research may examine the implementation of the framework across different cultural contexts, educational institutions, literary genres, and instructional settings to determine its practical effectiveness and broader applicability.

Overall, the methodology provides a systematic, theoretically grounded, and transparent process for developing the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework. By integrating complementary theoretical perspectives through conceptual synthesis, the study establishes a robust intellectual foundation for advancing learner-centred literary pedagogy and contributes a coherent framework capable of guiding future scholarship and educational practice in English language and literature education.

5. DISCUSSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) proposed in the present study represents an important conceptual advancement in contemporary literary pedagogy by offering an integrated model for developing critical reading competence in higher education. Building upon the theoretical foundations of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, the framework moves beyond the fragmented application of these perspectives and demonstrates how their integration can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of literary learning. The discussion presented in this study suggests that critical reading should not be viewed merely as the ability to comprehend textual information or identify literary devices; rather, it should be understood as a multidimensional intellectual process that requires learners to engage critically, reflectively, collaboratively, and contextually with literary texts. By positioning dialogue and reader engagement at the centre of literary interpretation, the DCRCF redefines critical reading as an active process of knowledge construction rather than passive knowledge acquisition.

A significant contribution of the proposed framework lies in its ability to bridge the gap between literary theory and educational practice. Existing research has extensively explored Bakhtinian Dialogism as a philosophical theory of language and interpretation, while Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory has primarily been discussed within the context of reader-centred literary criticism. However, these theories have often remained confined to independent theoretical discussions without sufficient attention to their combined pedagogical potential. The DCRCF demonstrates that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but inherently complementary. Bakhtin provides the social dimension of meaning-making by emphasising dialogue, plurality of voices, and interpretative openness, whereas Rosenblatt explains the personal dimension by recognising the reader's experiences, emotions, and cultural background as essential elements in constructing literary meaning. Their integration provides a balanced understanding of literary interpretation in which personal response is continuously refined through collaborative dialogue and supported by textual evidence.

The framework further contributes to current discussions on learner-centred education by challenging traditional instructional models that privilege teacher authority and predetermined literary interpretations. In many literature classrooms, students are frequently expected to reproduce established critical viewpoints, leaving limited opportunities for independent reasoning or interpretative exploration. Such practices may improve factual knowledge of literary texts but often fail to cultivate analytical thinking, reflective judgement, and intellectual confidence. The DCRCF proposes an alternative pedagogical orientation in which students actively negotiate meaning through discussion, questioning, comparison of perspectives, and reflective inquiry. This learner-centred approach transforms the literature classroom into a collaborative community where knowledge emerges through interaction among readers, texts, and diverse cultural experiences. Consequently, literary education becomes an intellectually engaging process that encourages learners to construct interpretations rather than simply receive them.

Another noteworthy contribution of the framework is its emphasis on multicultural literary engagement as a means of strengthening critical literacy. The selection of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction provides a particularly effective pedagogical context because her narratives explore complex human experiences associated with migration, identity, gender, memory, cultural hybridity, family relationships, and social belonging. These themes expose learners to diverse worldviews and encourage them to examine social realities from multiple cultural perspectives. The DCRCF therefore recognises multicultural literature not merely as a source of thematic knowledge but as an educational resource that stimulates empathy, intercultural awareness, ethical reflection, and critical dialogue. Students are encouraged to interrogate cultural assumptions, recognise ideological differences, and appreciate the complexity of human experiences represented in literary narratives. Such engagement enables literary learning to extend beyond textual interpretation towards the development of socially responsible and culturally responsive readers.

The discussion also highlights the framework's contribution to the development of higher-order cognitive abilities that are increasingly valued in contemporary higher education. Rather than limiting literary study to comprehension or appreciation, the DCRCF encourages learners to analyse narrative structures, evaluate conflicting interpretations, identify implicit assumptions, interpret symbolic meanings, and justify conclusions through close textual analysis. These intellectual activities require students to employ analytical reasoning, evidence-based argumentation, reflective thinking, and collaborative problem-solving throughout the reading process. Consequently, the framework aligns literary education with broader educational objectives that emphasise critical thinking, lifelong learning, effective communication, and informed decision-making. By integrating dialogic interaction, transactional engagement, and reflective inquiry within a unified pedagogical model, the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework offers a theoretically coherent and educationally relevant approach that significantly enriches the teaching and learning of literature in higher education.

The educational implications of the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) extend well beyond literary interpretation, offering meaningful directions for improving teaching practices, curriculum development, assessment strategies, and teacher preparation in higher education. As universities increasingly seek to develop graduates equipped with critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and intercultural competence, literature classrooms must evolve from spaces that primarily transmit textual knowledge into environments that actively cultivate intellectual inquiry. The proposed framework provides a practical pedagogical foundation for achieving this transformation by encouraging students to engage with literary texts through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative interpretation. Rather than treating literature as a collection of prescribed meanings, the DCRCF positions literary learning as a participatory process in which students construct understanding through reasoned discussion and evidence-based analysis.

One of the most significant educational implications of the framework relates to classroom pedagogy. Conventional approaches to literature teaching frequently rely on lectures, teacher explanations, and examination-oriented instruction, where students are expected to remember critical

interpretations rather than formulate their own. Although such methods may support content acquisition, they often restrict opportunities for independent thinking and meaningful interaction. The DCRCF advocates a learner-centred instructional environment in which classroom discussions become the primary medium for exploring literary texts. Teachers encourage students to ask questions, compare interpretations, challenge assumptions, and justify their viewpoints with textual evidence. This approach not only deepens literary understanding but also develops confidence in expressing ideas, respecting differing opinions, and participating in scholarly dialogue. As a result, classroom interaction becomes an integral part of the learning process rather than a supplementary activity.

The framework also offers important guidance for curriculum design in English language and literature programmes. Contemporary curricula should move beyond an exclusive focus on literary history and textual content by incorporating learning experiences that promote analytical reasoning and reflective engagement. The DCRCF supports the inclusion of dialogic seminars, collaborative reading circles, reflective journals, peer-led discussions, interpretative debates, and problem-based literary activities as regular components of literature courses. These pedagogical practices enable students to interact with literary texts from multiple perspectives while simultaneously developing communication, collaboration, and critical literacy skills. Curriculum developers may therefore use the framework as a reference for designing courses that balance theoretical knowledge with active student participation, ensuring that literary education contributes to both academic achievement and personal intellectual growth.

Teacher education represents another area where the proposed framework has considerable relevance. The successful implementation of dialogic literary pedagogy depends not only on students' willingness to participate but also on teachers' ability to facilitate meaningful discussion and create inclusive learning environments. Educators must be prepared to guide conversations without dominating them, encourage diverse viewpoints, and help students support their interpretations through careful textual analysis. Consequently, teacher preparation programmes should provide opportunities for prospective educators to develop expertise in dialogic teaching strategies, collaborative learning techniques, multicultural literary instruction, and reflective classroom practices. Professional development programmes for practising teachers may similarly incorporate workshops and training sessions that focus on facilitating evidence-based discussions, managing interpretative diversity, and promoting higher-order thinking through literary engagement. Such preparation will strengthen teachers' confidence in implementing learner-centred instructional approaches while fostering classrooms characterised by intellectual curiosity and respectful academic exchange.

The DCRCF further encourages the reconsideration of assessment practices in literature education. Traditional examinations often emphasise the recall of information, limiting students' opportunities to demonstrate analytical reasoning, interpretative flexibility, and reflective thinking. In contrast, the proposed framework supports assessment methods that evaluate students' ability to construct well-reasoned interpretations, participate effectively in collaborative discussions, and apply textual evidence to justify their conclusions. Reflective portfolios, analytical essays, seminar presentations, reading journals, group projects, peer assessment, and oral discussions provide authentic opportunities for learners to demonstrate dialogic critical reading competence. These assessment approaches recognise learning as a continuous developmental process rather than a single measurable outcome. By valuing critical inquiry, collaborative engagement, and thoughtful reflection alongside academic knowledge, the DCRCF promotes assessment practices that are more closely aligned with the educational objectives of twenty-first-century higher education. Ultimately, these pedagogical, curricular, instructional, and assessment implications demonstrate that the framework has the potential to transform literature classrooms into dynamic learning communities where students become active participants in the creation of knowledge, thereby strengthening both their literary competence and their broader intellectual development.

Beyond its immediate relevance to literature classrooms, the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) has broader implications for higher education, where the cultivation

of critical, reflective, and socially responsible graduates has become a central educational objective. Universities today are expected to prepare students not only with disciplinary knowledge but also with intellectual competencies that enable them to analyse complex issues, communicate effectively, collaborate across cultures, and respond thoughtfully to emerging global challenges. Within this context, the DCRCF offers a pedagogical model that aligns literary education with these broader institutional goals. By encouraging learners to engage in reflective inquiry, evidence-based interpretation, and constructive dialogue, the framework contributes to the development of transferable competencies that remain valuable beyond the study of literature. Students who participate in dialogic literary learning are likely to develop stronger reasoning abilities, greater confidence in expressing ideas, and an enhanced capacity to evaluate multiple perspectives before reaching informed conclusions. Such attributes are essential for academic success, professional practice, and responsible participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

The proposed framework also opens new possibilities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Although developed within the field of English language and literature education, its underlying principles are equally relevant to disciplines that require interpretation, discussion, and critical analysis. Subjects such as history, sociology, philosophy, political science, education, law, and cultural studies similarly encourage students to examine diverse viewpoints, interpret complex texts, and construct evidence-based arguments. The dialogic and reflective processes embedded within the DCRCF may therefore serve as a valuable instructional model across a range of academic disciplines where analytical thinking and collaborative learning are central educational outcomes. This interdisciplinary relevance strengthens the significance of the framework by demonstrating that dialogic critical reading is not restricted to literary studies but represents a broader educational approach to knowledge construction and intellectual engagement.

Despite its theoretical strengths, the proposed framework should be viewed within the context of certain limitations. As a conceptual investigation, the present study does not include classroom implementation or empirical testing of the framework. The relationships among dialogic interaction, transactional reading, multicultural literary engagement, and critical reading competence are established through theoretical synthesis rather than through direct observation or experimental validation. Consequently, the educational outcomes proposed in the framework remain conceptual and require empirical verification before broader pedagogical conclusions can be drawn. In addition, the framework has been developed using the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as its primary literary context. Although her works provide rich opportunities for multicultural interpretation, future studies may explore the applicability of the framework using literary texts from different cultural traditions, genres, historical periods, and linguistic backgrounds. Such investigations would contribute to evaluating the adaptability and robustness of the framework across diverse educational contexts.

These limitations provide meaningful directions for future research. Subsequent studies may employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs to examine the effectiveness of the DCRCF in enhancing students' critical reading competence, analytical reasoning, collaborative learning, and intercultural awareness. Classroom-based intervention studies may compare the framework with conventional literature teaching approaches to determine its influence on student engagement and academic performance. Researchers may also investigate teachers' experiences in implementing dialogic pedagogy, students' perceptions of collaborative literary discussions, and the relationship between dialogic interaction and higher-order cognitive development. Longitudinal investigations involving learners from different educational levels and cultural settings would further enrich understanding of the framework's long-term educational impact and practical applicability. Such empirical evidence would not only strengthen the theoretical foundations established in the present study but also support the continuous refinement of the framework in response to diverse teaching and learning environments.

In conclusion, the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework represents an original conceptual contribution to English language and literature education by integrating complementary

theoretical perspectives into a coherent pedagogical model for developing critical reading competence. The framework advances existing scholarship by demonstrating that literary understanding is most effectively cultivated through the interaction of dialogic learning, transactional engagement, reflective inquiry, and multicultural literary exploration. Its educational implications extend beyond literary interpretation to curriculum development, instructional practice, teacher education, assessment reform, and interdisciplinary learning. By promoting analytical reasoning, collaborative meaning-making, intercultural sensitivity, learner autonomy, and reflective judgement, the DCRCF reaffirms the enduring educational value of literature as a means of nurturing intellectually independent and socially responsible learners. It is anticipated that this framework will provide a strong theoretical foundation for future empirical investigations and contribute meaningfully to the continuing evolution of learner-centred literary pedagogy in higher education.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study has proposed the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF) as a comprehensive conceptual model for strengthening critical reading competence in higher education through the integration of Bakhtinian Dialogism, Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, and the multicultural fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The framework was developed in response to a significant gap identified in contemporary literary pedagogy, namely the absence of a unified instructional model that simultaneously acknowledges the dialogic nature of literary interpretation, the active role of the reader in meaning construction, and the educational potential of multicultural literary narratives. By bringing these complementary perspectives together within a coherent pedagogical framework, the study contributes a novel conceptual approach that extends both literary theory and educational practice.

One of the central arguments of this study is that critical reading competence should be understood as a multidimensional intellectual capacity rather than as a narrow linguistic or cognitive skill. Reading literature involves much more than understanding vocabulary, identifying literary devices, or recalling textual details. It requires learners to engage in careful analysis, reflective interpretation, collaborative discussion, ethical reasoning, and evidence-based evaluation while remaining receptive to multiple perspectives. The proposed framework therefore reconceptualises critical reading as a continuous process of intellectual inquiry in which literary meaning evolves through the reciprocal interaction of the text, the reader, classroom dialogue, and socio-cultural contexts. This perspective moves beyond traditional teacher-centred approaches by recognising students as active participants in the construction of literary knowledge.

The integration of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory constitutes a major theoretical contribution of the study. Although both perspectives have individually influenced literary scholarship and educational research for several decades, they have seldom been synthesised into a unified pedagogical model for developing critical reading competence. The DCRCF demonstrates that these theories complement one another in meaningful ways. Bakhtin provides the social and dialogic foundation by explaining how literary meaning develops through interaction among multiple voices and viewpoints, while Rosenblatt explains how readers actively construct meaning through their personal experiences, emotions, cultural identities, and prior knowledge. Their integration establishes a balanced understanding of literary learning in which individual interpretation and collaborative dialogue function as mutually reinforcing processes rather than independent activities.

The selection of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's fiction further strengthens the conceptual foundation of the framework by illustrating how multicultural literary texts can serve as powerful educational resources for promoting critical literacy and intercultural understanding. Her narratives present complex representations of migration, identity, gender, family relationships, cultural hybridity, memory, and belonging, thereby encouraging learners to engage with diverse human experiences from multiple perspectives. Such literary engagement enables students not only to analyse texts critically but also to develop empathy, cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness, and reflective judgement. Consequently,

literature becomes an educational medium through which intellectual development is closely connected with personal growth and social understanding.

The educational implications of the DCRCF extend across multiple dimensions of higher education. The framework encourages teachers to move away from transmission-oriented instruction towards dialogic learning environments where questioning, collaborative interpretation, and reflective discussion become central pedagogical practices. It also provides curriculum designers with a conceptual foundation for developing learner-centred literature courses that integrate discussion-based learning, reflective writing, collaborative inquiry, and evidence-based literary analysis. Furthermore, the framework supports assessment practices that recognise analytical reasoning, interpretative flexibility, collaborative participation, and reflective thinking alongside traditional academic achievement. These pedagogical implications demonstrate that the framework has the potential to contribute meaningfully to curriculum innovation, instructional improvement, teacher education, and assessment reform within English language and literature programmes.

Beyond literature education, the significance of the proposed framework lies in its alignment with the broader objectives of twenty-first-century higher education. Universities increasingly recognise that graduates require competencies such as critical thinking, effective communication, intercultural understanding, collaborative problem-solving, adaptability, and ethical decision-making to succeed in rapidly changing social and professional environments. The Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework supports the development of these competencies by encouraging students to analyse information critically, evaluate competing perspectives, construct logical arguments, participate in scholarly dialogue, and appreciate cultural diversity. In this respect, the framework contributes not only to literary scholarship but also to the broader educational mission of preparing intellectually independent, socially responsible, and globally competent graduates.

As a conceptual investigation, the present study also establishes a strong theoretical foundation for future empirical research. Although the framework has been developed through systematic conceptual synthesis rather than classroom experimentation, it provides clearly defined constructs that can be examined through qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research designs. Future investigations may evaluate the effectiveness of the DCRCF across different educational contexts, literary genres, cultural settings, and learner populations. Researchers may also explore its influence on students' critical reading competence, collaborative learning, analytical reasoning, intercultural awareness, and learner autonomy through longitudinal and intervention-based studies. Such empirical evidence will not only validate the framework but also contribute to its continuous refinement and wider educational application.

The study further highlights the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue in educational research. The concepts embedded within the DCRCF have relevance beyond English language and literature because dialogic learning, reflective inquiry, and evidence-based interpretation are equally valuable in disciplines such as history, philosophy, law, education, sociology, political science, cultural studies, and communication. The framework therefore offers a transferable educational model capable of supporting critical inquiry across diverse academic fields where interpretation, discussion, and collaborative knowledge construction play significant roles.

In summary, the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework represents an original and meaningful contribution to contemporary literary pedagogy by integrating dialogic interaction, transactional reading, and multicultural literary engagement within a single conceptual model. It responds directly to the limitations identified in previous scholarship and offers a coherent theoretical explanation of how critical reading competence can be cultivated through collaborative meaning-making, reflective interpretation, and sustained engagement with literature. By bridging the gap between literary theory and educational practice, the framework enriches current understandings of learner-centred literary instruction and provides practical guidance for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational researchers.

Ultimately, the study reaffirms that literature possesses a transformative educational potential that extends far beyond aesthetic appreciation or textual analysis. When students engage with literary texts through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative inquiry, they become capable of questioning assumptions, recognising multiple perspectives, constructing evidence-based interpretations, and responding thoughtfully to the complexities of human experience. The Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework therefore positions literary education as a powerful means of nurturing critical literacy, intellectual curiosity, intercultural understanding, and lifelong learning. It is anticipated that the framework will stimulate further scholarly investigation, encourage innovative pedagogical practices, and contribute to the continuing advancement of English language and literature education in higher education institutions worldwide.

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ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is a conceptual research investigation and does not involve human participants, human data, human biological materials, animals, or experimental procedures. Consequently, ethical approval from an Institutional Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board was not required. Similarly, informed consent to participate was not applicable, as no primary data were collected or analysed.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable. The manuscript does not contain any identifiable personal information, images, or data relating to individual participants that would require consent for publication.

Availability of Data and Materials

No datasets were generated, collected, or analysed during the current study. The findings are derived from a conceptual synthesis and critical interpretation of existing scholarly literature. Therefore, data sharing is not applicable.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known financial, professional, institutional, or personal competing interests that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

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Authors' Contributions

The authors collectively conceived the research idea, identified the research gap, designed the conceptual framework, conducted the literature review, synthesised the theoretical perspectives, developed the Dialogic Critical Reading Competence Framework (DCRCF), interpreted the findings, and wrote, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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