



Critical thinking in teaching reading in university English programs in South America: a narrative review

*Pensamiento crítico en la enseñanza de la lectura en
programas universitarios de inglés en Sudamérica: una
revisión narrativa*

*Pensamento crítico no ensino da leitura em cursos de inglês
universitários na América do Sul: uma revisão narrativa*

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ABSTRACT

This narrative review summarizes recent studies (2020-2025) that analyze how university foreign language teachers in South America promote the teaching of reading and critical thinking (CT) in university students, based on critical pedagogy and sociocultural theory,



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examining three areas: teaching experiences with reading teaching, its conceptualization and implementation of CT, and institutional factors that influence pedagogical decisions. The results indicate a strong teaching commitment to train analytical and critical readers; however, the implementation varies between contexts. Many teachers use sociocultural methods such as collaborative reading to promote critical-pedagogical practices based on management and autonomous learning. Limitations such as curricula based on standardized assessment, uneven teacher preparation, class sizes, and disparities in resources in public and private institutions make it difficult to consolidate critical reading in the long term. Many studies focus on student outcomes rather than teachers' experiences, professional identities, and negotiations in the situation, which is a major limitation in literature. This review offers a mixed view of reading and pedagogy, suggesting the need for teacher-centred studies, better teacher training and policy changes to align assessment systems with critical literacy objectives. Improving structural and pedagogical support is crucial to developing critical and meaningful thinking with academic texts among readers of English as a foreign language.

KEYWORDS: reading-teaching in English; critical thinking; critical pedagogy; sociocultural theory.

RESUMEN

Esta revisión narrativa resume estudios recientes (2020-2025) que analizan cómo los profesores universitarios de lenguas extranjeras en Sudamérica promueven la lectura y el pensamiento crítico (PC) entre estudiantes universitarios, con base en la pedagogía crítica y la teoría sociocultural. La revisión examina tres áreas: experiencias docentes con instrucción lectora, la conceptualización e implementación del PC, y los factores institucionales que influyen en las decisiones pedagógicas. Los resultados indican un fuerte compromiso de los docentes con el desarrollo de lectores analíticos y críticos; sin embargo, la implementación varía según el contexto. Muchos docentes utilizan métodos socioculturales, como la lectura colaborativa, para promover prácticas crítico-pedagógicas basadas en la gestión y el aprendizaje autónomo. Limitaciones como los currículos basados en evaluaciones estandarizadas, la formación docente desigual, el tamaño de las clases y las disparidades de recursos en instituciones públicas y privadas dificultan la consolidación de la lectura crítica a largo plazo. Muchos estudios se centran en los resultados de los estudiantes en lugar de las experiencias de los docentes, las identidades profesionales y las negociaciones situacionales, lo que representa una limitación significativa en la literatura. Esta revisión ofrece una visión híbrida de la lectura y la pedagogía, sugiriendo la necesidad de estudios centrados en el docente, la mejora de la formación docente y cambios en las políticas para alinear los sistemas de evaluación con los objetivos del pensamiento crítico, con mayor apoyo estructural y pedagógico crucial para el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico y significativo en textos académicos entre los lectores de inglés como lengua extranjera.

PALABRAS CLAVE: enseñanza de la lectura en inglés; pensamiento crítico; pedagogía crítica; teoría sociocultural.

RESUMO

Esta revisão narrativa sintetiza estudos recentes (2020–2025) que analisam como professores universitários de línguas estrangeiras na América do Sul promovem a leitura e o pensamento crítico (PC) entre estudantes universitários, com base na pedagogia crítica e na teoria sociocultural. A revisão examina três áreas: experiências do corpo docente com o ensino, a conceitualização e implementação do PC e os fatores institucionais que influenciam as decisões pedagógicas. Os resultados indicam um forte comprometimento do corpo docente com o desenvolvimento de leitores analíticos e críticos; no entanto, a implementação varia de acordo com o contexto. Muitos professores utilizam métodos socioculturais, como a leitura colaborativa, para promover práticas crítico-pedagógicas baseadas na gestão e na aprendizagem autônoma. Limitações como currículos baseados em avaliações padronizadas, formação desigual de professores, tamanho das turmas e disparidades de recursos entre instituições públicas e privadas dificultam a consolidação generalizada da leitura crítica. Muitos estudos se concentram nos resultados dos alunos em vez das experiências dos professores, identidades profissionais e negociações situacionais, o que representa uma limitação significativa na literatura. Esta revisão oferece uma visão híbrida do ensino e da pedagogia, sugerindo a necessidade de estudos centrados no professor, aprimoramento da formação docente e mudanças nas políticas para alinhar os sistemas de avaliação aos objetivos do pensamento crítico. Um maior suporte estrutural e pedagógico é crucial para o desenvolvimento do pensamento crítico e significativo em textos acadêmicos para leitores de inglês como língua estrangeira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ensino da leitura em inglês; pensamento crítico; pedagogia crítica; teoria sociocultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is necessary for students at universities in South America as they need to acquire high proficiency in reading and critical thinking to succeed in academic performance. The ability to think critically is also related to creativity and civic activity (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023). A good reading comprehension helps to understand complex texts and to develop knowledge in the discipline. Despite EFL's curricular goals, obstacles such as the grammar-focused curriculum, large class sizes, and poor pedagogical preparation contribute to superficial learning rather than essential inquiry (Fandino Parra et al., 2021; Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023). Although tertiary education in English is supposed to produce competent readers, most programs have been found to fail. Emphasizing standardized assessment inhibits deeper reading habits, resulting in students who are able to repeat linguistic patterns, but who do not analyze (Fandino Parra et al., 2021). As a result, students struggle with complicated texts in critical writing, and lack preparation to analyze evidence or construct arguments (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023).

The adoption of intensive reading disposition in literary techniques has shown promise in cognitive comprehension (Espinosa-Cevallos, Cortes-Mtz, & Soto, 2022). Action research activities, such as critical thinking tests and project-oriented tasks, have boosted student engagement (Chica Ramírez et al., 2023; Espinosa-Cevallos et al., 2022). However, Latin American literature shows a scarce study of the pedagogical mentality and situational adaptations of teachers with priority on student achievement (Ma'rufa & Mustofa, 2021; Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016).

The lack of focus on the teacher's voice is important, as the adoption of a classroom depends on the beliefs, constraints, and decisions of the teachers. Lacking an understanding of how teachers theorize the concepts of reading and critical thinking and how institutional conditions influence practice, policy reforms are likely to be out of step with local practice.

The most direct are gaps in reading competence and the transfer of critical skills; indirect factors impact graduates' willingness to conduct research and critical reasoning (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023; Fandino Parra et al., 2021). Although current interventions capture the strategies, the teaching perspective is not well reflected in the literature on reading and critical thinking in English in South America.

There is no evidence or contextual representations of how EFL university professors view reading instruction, how higher-order thinking is promoted, or how they overcome institutional pressure. Teachers' stories show how political and pedagogical principles can be translated into real decisions (Ma'rufa & Mustofa, 2021).

In this sense, Latin American authors warn that, without taking into account socio-political aspects, ideas from critical thinking from the Global North must be imported (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023). This study is an amalgam of critical pedagogy and sociocultural approaches. Critical pedagogy analyzes the autonomous possibilities and power of education in classroom interaction, while sociocultural theory analyzes the social and situational character of learning.

These lenses allow for narrative research in which teachers are seen as reflective actors whose decisions are constructed based on institutional conditions and culture (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023; Ma'rufa & Mustofa, 2021).

Although the scope of study of South American research is broad, empirical studies focus on Ecuador, Chile and Colombia. Figure 1 shows how critical and sociocultural pedagogy delineates teacher narratives and therefore student outcomes.

Figure 1. *Conceptual framework integrating critical pedagogy and sociocultural theory.*



Note: This diagram shows how critical pedagogy (questions of power and ideology) and sociocultural pedagogy (scaffolding, peer mediation, collaborative reading) intersect to shape teacher narratives and student outcomes.

The objectives of this research are focused on exploring how these teachers conceptualize and promote critical thinking in reading teaching and on identifying contextual challenges and supports such as institutional policies, assessment regimes, materials, and teacher training that influence instructional decisions. Since this research follows a narrative review methodology, the emphasis is exploratory: the study seeks to bring to light patterns and tensions in the stories lived by teachers rather than testing a specific quantitative hypothesis (Ma'rufa & Mustofa, 2021).

This study theoretically contributes by expanding the literature on English reading and critical thinking through teaching experience and regional conceptions of criticism (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023). In practice, it helps trainers and administrators better tailor professional development and materials to support students' reading habits. Teachers' narratives help to bridge the gap between aspirational competencies and realities in the classroom (Fandiño Parra et al., 2021).

The combination of reading competence and critical thinking (CT) is at the core of university teaching of English as a foreign language: the former is the key to knowledge, and the latter allows for criticism and synthesis. The combination is vital as English influences better academic and career opportunities. Current local research analyzes the perception and application of reading and CT in the local institutional environment. This review considers peer-reviewed studies on the topic in the South American region (2020-2025), in terms of teachers' reading teaching

strategies, conceptualization of CT in reading, and contextual influences on instructional decision-making.

Despite this evidence, little empirical research has been conducted on the lived experience of teachers with the teaching of reading in South American universities. According to Castaño-Roldán and Correa (2021), a qualitative intervention with English learners of Colombian origin focused on critical reading activities demonstrates improvements in posture awareness and authorial comprehension. The study uses the advantages of classroom-based approaches that show positive results, but does not record systematic records of reflective interviews with teachers or institutional constraints that define task options. For their part, Espinosa-Cevallos, Cortés-Martínez, and Soto (2022) conducted action research based on literary circles at a state university in Ecuador. Their results indicate an increase in student engagement and vocabulary development in the context of resource scarcity. Nonetheless, teachers' reports of curriculum negotiation and workload remain implicit, as research focuses on the impact on students rather than the teachers' experience.

These investigations show that there are feasible reading practices in South American universities and also show a lack in the systematic description of how teachers experience the administration of reading teaching, as well as the problem of institutional expectations in relation to pedagogical objectives.

On the other hand, it should be noted that studies on the conceptualization and development of CT by teachers in the teaching of reading indicate that there is strong support but a varied interpretation. A study by Veliz (2021) on Chilean teachers states that they value CT as a life skill and as a means of sociopolitical awareness, whereby critical reading is associated with students' abilities to analyze textual ideologies. The article offers an in-depth look at teachers' opinions, but it is limited by its limited sample and intentions rather than by classroom practice. Likewise, Castano-Roldán and Correa (2021) establish pedagogical processes that lead to analytical reading through structured tasks. Although teachers use the CT during reading lessons, institutional factors such as assessment pressure and class size influence its use. According to the literature, the development of CT is valued as a teaching resource in the area of English and the development of basic EFL skills by South American teachers.

Despite the successful prospects for the use of CT in university classrooms in some South American universities, there are contextual and institutional facilitation aspects that shape the practice between reading and the development of CT. Barre-Parrales and Villafuerto-Holguin (2021) found that in Ecuador there were public-private differences in CLIL policy: private school training and materials were better, and the education system with public schools had fewer educational opportunities

and priorities. His paper is a combination of surveys and comparative analyses, but the pre-college approach limits its applicability to universities.

Their findings on resource inequality could also be useful for university English teachers, when working with several students with different reading levels, which explains the disparity in the consolidation of these skills. In turn, according to Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2023), there is an epistemic disjunction in Latin American higher education, in which imported cognitive models have taken control of regional critical pedagogical traditions.

Their review indicates that interventions focus on cognitive skills and not on the sociopolitical context, which is consistent with other studies that indicate that curricula favor *measurable outcomes* (Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte-Holguin, 2021; Veliz, 2021). The review reveals the incompatibility of the CT as an abstract and practical autonomous skill.

Although there is a consensus among these authors that they use good strategies to develop CT such as literary circles, structured critical readings, the context of their development is also important, that is, evaluation systems, inequalities and teacher training influence what they can do and *measure* teachers.

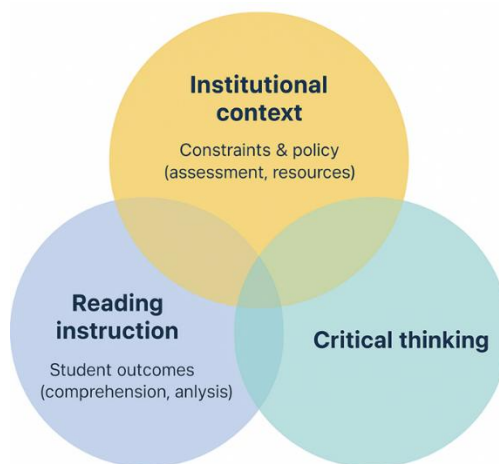
Moreover, there are inconsistencies: action research reports the benefits for students of reading/CT interventions (Espinosa-Cevallos et al., 2022), but more general reviews (Guzmán-Valenzuela et al., 2023) reveal that research activity favors the use of cognitive tests, rather than the effect of contextual pedagogy.

Most importantly, however, the empirical corpus indicates that South American researchers are aware of the relevance of reading and CT, and have outlined potentially effective strategies in the classroom, but without a long-term focus on the implementation of these methods by higher education professors at their respective universities.

A narrative review that designs the experiences of professors in South American universities will record teaching practices, expose the negotiation strategies of professors under the influence of policies, and contextualize the CT in its local sociocultural environment.

These objectives are directly addressed in the study through the accountability of teacher narratives on reading teaching, the conceptualization of CT, and the institutional mapping of institutional supports that influence decision-making. Figure 2 shows the interrelationship of the areas previously expressed, and how they complement each other.

Figure 2. *Overlapping thematic areas synthesized in this review.*



Note: Figure 2 is used as a map for structuring the Results and Discussion sections in alignment with the review objectives.

The figure illustrates three interrelated domains: (1) reported reading-instruction practices, (2) conceptualizations/operationalizations of critical thinking in reading, and (3) contextual and institutional factors shaping implementation and teacher decision-making.

2. METHODS: METHODOLOGICAL ROUTE

The study used a narrative review of the literature to identify the experiences of English teachers in South American universities in terms of reading skills and critical thinking development among undergraduate students. This method was selected because the objectives required interpretative synthesis of evidence at the qualitative and policy levels, and not the reproducibility of the systematic review. Issues that require conceptual clarification and critical examination of various tests are best utilized through narrative reviews (Grant & Booth, 2009; Torraco, 2005).

The arrangement of the story allows us to reveal patterns of context, while being sensitive to experiential nuances (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The researchers studied tertiary education in English in South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. The study was conducted in the field of 2020-2025, including curricular changes before and after the pandemic and taking into account previous structural research (Popay et al., 2006; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The literature search was based on the Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC and Latin American collections databases, combining terms such as EFL, reading comprehension, critical thinking, higher education and South American background. Snowball sampling also helped to provide other sources, as the principles of narrative revision are followed (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016; Popay et al., 2006). The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed sources published between 2020 and 2025 that reported instruction in reading, critical thinking, and contextual factors in the EFL in South American universities, and the articles that reported on pedagogical practices or institutional structure were related to Spanish, Portuguese, and English (Grant & Booth, 2009).

The data were organized in the form of a grid of bibliographic information, research interests, environmental factors, approaches and conclusions that refer to the pedagogy of reading and the development of critical thinking.

The analysis took place in three steps, following the instructions on synthesizing the narrative and synthesizing the theme. First, the authors summarized descriptive data of every study (country, design, participants/context, instructional focus, and reported outcomes) and created a table of this information (Table 1). Second, an inductive thematic coding system was performed on the findings and discussion content that was extracted on the sources that had been selected. First open codes were created to describe (a) reading-instruction practices, (b) operationalizations of critical thinking/critical reading and (c) contextual circumstances that influenced implementation. Third, codes were narrowed down after constant comparison and organized into higher-order categories with the help of analytic memos to record decisions and eliminate overlaps.

Examples of emergent categories were: (1) sociocultural scaffolding practices (e.g. collaborative reading routines, guided questioning, strategy teaching), (2) critical-pedagogical goals (e.g. ideology critique, stance-taking, text-context correspondence), (3) institutional constraints (assessment regimes, class size, time, materials, training).

The concepts of qualitative value assessment in narrative reviews are different from those that can be quantified in systematic reviews. This review investigated the clarity of methodology, justification for sampling, and validity of interpretation. The limitations of the leading writers were exposed and gaps in evidence between countries were pointed out as areas requiring research.

This method combined broad inclusivity with discriminatory criticism and formed a discourse that delimited current events and denoted gaps in the literature (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Grant & Booth, 2009).

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Table 1. *Corpus of studies included in this research*

Study	Country	Design	Participants / Context	Focus	Key Findings
Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte-Holguín (2021)	Ecuador	Mixed-method	70 EFL teachers; 9 institutions	CLIL in EFL teaching	Uneven CLIL implementation; teachers face methodological & institutional challenges.
Espinosa-Cevallos et al. (2022)	Ecuador	Action-research	214 EFL university students; 3 teachers	Literature Circles	Improved engagement, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and critical dialogue.
Castaño-Roldán & Correa (2021)	Colombia	Qualitative classroom study	University EFL reading course	Critical reading unit	Students developed critical awareness but struggled with author stance and evaluation.
Chica Ramírez et al. (2023)	Colombia	Action-research	Ninth-grade EFL learners (VLE context)	CT questionnaires to support reading	CT tasks in VLE enhanced reading comprehension; provides school-level comparison insights.
Cruz-Zambrano et al. (2023)	Ecuador	Quasi-experimental	60 university EFL learners	Reading strategies	Experimental group improved comprehension, vocabulary & idea identification.
Veliz (2021)	Chile	Qualitative (teacher reflections)	In-service EFL teachers in MA program	Critical thinking in ELT	Teachers report limited CT training; institutional pressures constrain critical pedagogy.
Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2023)	Latin America	Systematic review	HE CT studies across region	CT conceptualizations	Reveals cognitive dominance & limited critical-pedagogical approaches (epistemic disjuncture).
Fandiño Parra et al. (2021)	Latin America	Documentary review	LATAM teacher-education sources	CT in teacher preparation	Highlights inconsistent CT training and fragmented theoretical approaches.

Note: Table 1 summarizes the studies included in the final corpus and their main methodological and contextual characteristics.

3. RESULTS: INDICATIONS AND FINDINGS

Among the main results, it was found that small-scale interventions are successful; such is the case of Castano-Roldán and Correa (2021) and Espinosa-Cevallos et al. (2022) whose studies reflected improving students' comprehension through literary reading circles, respectively. The questionnaires provided by Chica Ramirez et al. (2023) increased students' metacognitive awareness. These research studies confirm that reading can be effective in resource-limited South American settings.

The instructional direction which has been most strongly supported across the empirical research in the corpus is a hybrid approach which integrates sociocultural scaffolding (e.g., collaborative reading routines, e.g. literature circles, guided questioning and peer discussion and strategy teaching) with explicit critical-pedagogical questioning (e.g. author stance, ideology, and text-to-context connections). Outcomes dealing with students are most likely to be enhanced when critical reading activities are carried out in a structured interaction and guidance as opposed to using critical thinking in solitary activities.

In Ecuadorian university settings, collaborative literary practices and strategy-instruction are linked to engagement, vocabulary, and comprehension gains, but in Colombian work settings critical awareness gains are found through structured critical reading units and guided questioning, though studies also indicate that sustained implementation is moderated by assessment regimes, class size, training, and resource conditions.

The Ecuador studies are concentrated on classroom intervention and instructional routines (e.g., collaborative reading and strategy instruction) with statistically significant improvements in comprehension related outcomes. Colombian is more explicit on the rationale of critical reading as stance, evaluation and awareness building based on structured critical reading activities and guided questionnaires.

Chilean evidence foreshadows teacher preparation and institutional pressure, in which the teachers recognize the importance of critical thinking but claim to be constrained by factors that restrict the prolonged critical pedagogy. The reviews of the regions also reveal that the models of higher education research are inclined to favor the cognitive skills, which introduces an epistemic gap between Latin American critical-pedagogic traditions and the epistemic values of the research.

However, the review by Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2023) revealed persistent analytical gaps in higher education in Latin America, where students entered professional life without being fully prepared in some skills related to critical thinking applied in the university context, which raises the following question: why are certain interventions effective and the overall results remain low?

In this sense, implementation is the key, through effective interventions whose teachers are dedicated to using medium to small groups, special materials and external professional assistance, is recommended. Standard contexts vary: teachers teach large courses with mandatory curricula and assessment guidelines that limit innovation.

This shows that good strategies exist, but that they do not work under normal conditions. Informing teachers about the best possible situations offers minimal advice to teachers working in restricted conditions. The discipline requires studies on how to maintain critical reading pedagogy under institutional conditions of large class sizes, standardized tests, and limited resources.

On the other hand, the fact that Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2023) observed an epistemic mismatch is important. Theories of critical thinking in the north are more concerned with the cognition of individuals and do not coincide with Latin American pedagogical practices rooted in liberation theology and social change. Educators who employ the Freire methodology are not convinced that cognitive skills models are sufficient for their teaching goals. This raises evaluation problems. Although standardized tests assess logical thinking and analysis, they lack critical awareness as observed by Latin American educators; the ability to recognize an ideological point of view and relate texts to structural inequalities. Students can also be very good at reasoning, but not very critical of power relations.

Studies indicated that methods for integrating mental abilities and critical awareness would likely be best. The development of structured analysis, the preoccupation with power, and ideology guarantee the result of critical rather than technical analysis. Therefore, it is important to develop these structures of critical thinking demand based on Latin American records, and thus try to reduce the academic gap between the process of critical thinking development and the result achieved as a professional, which will be analyzed in the next section.

4. DISCUSSION: MEANINGS IN DIALOGUE

Research indicated that there has been a consistent disparity between teacher intentions and critical reading practice in English teaching, specifically in South America. Although educators value the importance of critical reading and analytical thinking, assessment requires skills and resources that do not facilitate effective implementation in the Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Chilean contexts.

The causes of this gap in implementation are due, firstly, to lack of practical knowledge about the application of critical pedagogy in teachers. Second, assessment systems that focus on measurable outcomes over critical thinking.

Third, resource inequality and large class sizes limit the feasibility of student-centered, discussion-based methods.

The interaction between sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy explains the trends in the classroom. Most of the Vygotskian practices that teachers embrace include scaffolding, small group reading and comprehension practices because they deliver quantifiable gains and are administratively feasible.

In comparison, the emancipation goals of the critical pedagogy to raise critical consciousness and challenge power are hard to operationalize in the context of accountability. It is this pragmatic compromise that would justify the instrumental usage of sociocultural tools as opposed to serving as a means of attaining enduring critical awareness.

5. CONCLUSIONS: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This narrative review has synthesized research related to topics on the development of critical thinking in reading in English in South American university contexts, fulfilling three objectives: to report on the method of teaching reading used by teachers, to examine the conceptualizations and practices relevant to the development of critical thinking, and to define the contextual factors that influence teachers' pedagogical decisions. The synthesis showed consistent tendencies, didactic contradictions, and notable gaps that, together, trace the directions of future study and practice.

Three key findings were identified in the review. Although teachers value critical reading and thinking, implementation in some cases is skill-oriented down to the dialogic level. The pedagogy of critical reading is limited by contextual factors, evaluation pressures, inequalities in the allocation of resources, and gaps in teacher training. The opinions of teachers facing these limitations are not adequate and academic research has been conducted on student performance and not on teacher decision-making and progress.

Critical pedagogical analysis and sociocultural theory analysis revealed that these frameworks are parallel discourses in South American EFL contexts. Educators share student Freirean goals but employ more Vygotskian pedagogical tools such as scaffolding and strategic teaching. This resembles the usefulness of sociocultural methods and the constraints on the mechanisms of systematic implementation of critical pedagogy. The review promotes the incorporation of sociocultural practices as a means to critical-pedagogical ends other than the impartial development of skills.

Based on the synthesis of the findings of the studies included, the best approach to developing the reading competence of students and their critical thinking in the typical conditions of South American EFL universities is a structured, hybrid strategy: (a) sociocultural scaffolding with the help of collaborative reading (e.g., literature circle, role of peer discussion, guidance strategies in reading, teacher questioning sequence, text-to-context reading), and (b) explicit critical reading prompts that define critical thinking as taking a stance, assessing evidence, interpreting the text in relation to its context. The reason why the approach is described as the most appropriate is that it is the most commonly supported in the corpus and under conditions typical of most performance (large classes, limited resources, and accountability-driven assessment).

This review contributed to deepening the understanding of the relationships between critical pedagogy and sociocultural theory in South American conditions, revealing synergies and tensions. In addition, this review suggested the use of reading tasks based on both sociocultural scaffolding and critical-pedagogical questioning, because, in the future, critical and sociocultural frameworks can be integrated into teachers' preparation programs, likewise, administrators will be able to adapt evaluations and critical thinking objectives and manage the imbalance of resources. This will allow for more research and the promotion of critical thinking in a contextually appropriate way that respects Latin American traditions.

However, it should be noted that these contributions have some limitations. This review focused on Colombia, Ecuador and Chile; The results cannot be generalized to other nations with other educational systems or cultural backgrounds. Small qualitative studies offer enriching information, but they cannot be generalized; considering the latter, practices may work, but not their prevalence or generalized applicability. Recent literature has not resolved the gap between teacher voices, limiting understanding of how educators manage constraints. The following limitations propose three research priorities. The first is that the field requires multi-site comparative research on teaching experiences in various South American settings, such as different countries, institutions, and evaluation regimes. Research in this direction should be directed at the teaching narrative to learn how practices develop under the pressure of the context.

Second, intervention research should be conducted in combination with a critical-pedagogical framework with sociocultural approaches to evaluate linguistic and dispositional interventions using longitudinal evaluation. The question that needs to be examined in the research is whether or not there is a difference between reading programs that incorporate the critical elements and innovative programs that focus on reading skills to influence students' habits and reasoning.

Third, policy research should study evaluation systems to determine possibilities for reform. This involves exploring the nature of assessment systems that facilitate the development of critical thinking and schemes that facilitate pedagogical practices.

This discipline requires a theoretical contribution to create contextual critical thinking concepts in Latin American higher education. The epistemic disjunction identified by Guzmán-Valenzuela et al. (2023) between imported models and regional traditions necessitates the creation of frameworks based on Latin American philosophical traditions, but not the adaptation of models from the North. Although current studies focus on teaching experience, they offer a minimal narrative for the teacher.

Finally, English teachers in South America are under difficult conditions: they need to develop reading and critical thinking skills at the same time, they work in results-oriented institutions, and in many cases, they are not fully prepared to set the appropriate guidelines for the development of these critical skills, for various reasons. Articles by Espinosa-Cevallos et al. (2022) and Castaño-Roldán and Correa (2021) sampled successful innovations by teachers despite these limitations. That is, the shift towards a systematic pedagogy of critical reading will require better tools, preparation, and organization of teachers: evaluation regimes that reward critical interaction, equitable distribution of resources, and research that learns through teaching experience. A teacher-centred research agenda, which is methodologically varied, can be used to maintain and scale up effective classroom practices, which aim to make pedagogical practice, theoretical commitments and institutional structures consistent with the formation of EFL readers, who think critically and act thoughtfully outside the classroom.

Figure 3. *Practical recommendations for researchers, teachers and educators, institutions and policymakers.*



Note: Figure 3 shows a conceptualization that reflects the aspects necessary to address and develop critical thinking from the perspective of university teachers, with a structured approach in integrative.

6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in relation to this article. They have not received funding or support from any organization or entity that could influence the content of the work.

7. CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

Author 1 Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Research, Methodology, Project Management, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Review and Editing.
Author 2 Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Research, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Proofreading and Editing.

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