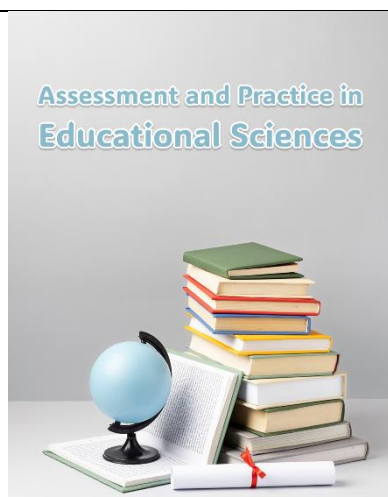




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1. Mohammad. Baset Dorrazahi^{ID}: Ph.D. Student, Department of English Language and Literature, ST.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
2. Farahnaz. Yosefi^{ID}: Assistant Professor, Department of English language and Literature, Zah.C., Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran (Email: f.yousefi87@iau.ac.ir)
3. Seyyed Shahabeddin. Sadati^{ID}: Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Translation, Ro.C., Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran.

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Modeling the Relationship Between Literary Representations of Violence and the Development of Critical Literacy in Education: A Study of Pakistani English Literature

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to model the relationship between literary representations of violence and the development of critical literacy in educational contexts through an examination of Pakistani English literature and its pedagogical implications. This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive and critical paradigm. The data corpus consisted of purposively selected Pakistani English literary texts that prominently represented various forms of violence, including political, social, gendered, symbolic, and structural violence. Data were collected through close textual analysis, document review, and examination of educational interpretations of literary narratives. The selected texts were analyzed using principles of critical literacy and critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of representation, ideological structures, narrative strategies, power relations, and pedagogical implications. The analytical process involved thematic coding, iterative interpretation, and conceptual modeling to explain how literary violence may contribute to critical literacy development among learners in educational settings. The findings indicated that literary representations of violence functioned as discursive sites through which issues of power, identity, exclusion, inequality, resistance, and social justice became visible and open to critical interrogation. Students' engagement with violent narratives progressed from emotional reactions toward contextual, ideological, and ethical interpretations when supported by critical pedagogical practices. The analysis revealed that structural violence, gendered oppression, silenced voices, and ideological normalization of harm were recurring themes that facilitated critical reflection. Furthermore, dialogic classroom interaction, contextualization of literary events, and critical questioning emerged as essential pedagogical conditions for transforming literary violence into a resource for critical literacy. The resulting model suggested that critical literacy develops through a progressive sequence involving affective engagement, contextual understanding, discourse analysis, ethical positioning, and critical social awareness. The study concludes that Pakistani English literature possesses significant potential for fostering critical literacy when literary representations of violence are approached through critical pedagogical frameworks. Rather than functioning solely as narrative content, violent literary representations can encourage learners to question dominant discourses, recognize hidden power relations, examine marginalized perspectives, and develop socially informed interpretations of texts and reality. The findings highlight the importance of integrating critical literacy approaches into literature education to promote reflective, analytical, and socially responsible forms of learning.

Keywords: Critical Literacy; Literary Violence; Pakistani English Literature; Violence Representation; Literature Education; Critical Discourse Analysis; Pedagogy; Social Justice; Power Relations; Literary Studies.

Introduction

Literature has long been recognized as a powerful medium through which societies narrate their histories, negotiate collective identities, and confront experiences of conflict and suffering. Within educational contexts, literary texts serve not

only as sources of linguistic and aesthetic learning but also as vehicles for exploring social realities, ethical dilemmas, and ideological structures. In recent decades, scholars in literacy education have increasingly emphasized the importance of moving beyond traditional reading practices that focus primarily on comprehension and interpretation toward approaches that encourage learners to critically examine how texts construct meanings, represent social groups, and reproduce or challenge power relations. This shift has contributed to the emergence of critical literacy as a major framework in contemporary educational theory and practice. Critical literacy views reading as an active, socially situated process through which learners interrogate assumptions, question dominant narratives, and analyze the relationship between language and power (1-3). Within this perspective, literary texts become more than artistic artifacts; they become sites where readers can engage critically with issues of inequality, identity, ideology, and social justice (4, 5).

The growing importance of critical literacy is particularly evident in societies characterized by complex historical experiences, cultural diversity, political tensions, and ongoing struggles over representation. Pakistan represents one such context. Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has experienced profound political transformations, ideological contestations, ethnic conflicts, religious tensions, gender inequalities, and socio-economic disparities. These realities have influenced not only the country's political and social development but also its literary production. Pakistani English literature has emerged as an important body of writing that reflects the complexities of Pakistani society while simultaneously engaging with global literary and intellectual traditions (6-8). Through novels, short stories, poems, and literary essays, Pakistani writers have explored themes such as partition, displacement, nationalism, violence, identity formation, religious extremism, gender oppression, social exclusion, and cultural transformation. Consequently, Pakistani English literature provides rich opportunities for examining how narratives represent violence and how readers may critically engage with such representations (9, 10).

Violence occupies a particularly significant place in Pakistani literary discourse. The historical trauma of partition, recurring episodes of political instability, sectarian conflict, terrorism, military interventions, gender-based violence, and structural inequalities have left deep marks on the national imagination. These experiences are frequently reflected in literary texts that depict not only physical violence but also psychological, symbolic, cultural, environmental, and institutional forms of harm. Contemporary literary works often portray violence as a complex social phenomenon embedded within broader systems of power and inequality rather than merely as isolated acts of aggression. Such representations invite readers to question the causes, consequences, and legitimizing mechanisms of violence within society (6, 8, 9).

Recent scholarship on Pakistani literature has further expanded understandings of how violence intersects with questions of identity, gender, environment, memory, and national belonging. Research examining literary representations of women demonstrates how narratives expose systems of patriarchal control and the social construction of gendered marginalization (11, 12). Studies of gender discourse in Pakistani media similarly reveal the persistence of unequal representational practices that shape public perceptions of women and social roles (13, 14). These patterns suggest that violence often operates through discursive and symbolic mechanisms that are normalized within cultural institutions and social practices. Literary texts that reveal such mechanisms can therefore become important resources for critical literacy development because they enable readers to identify and challenge dominant assumptions about gender, power, and social relations.

At the same time, Pakistani literature has frequently engaged with questions of national identity, colonial legacies, and ideological conflict. Studies investigating postcolonial fiction demonstrate how literary narratives reconstruct national identities while simultaneously exposing tensions between official histories and lived experiences (15, 16). Similarly, analyses of ethnic and religious representation reveal how discourse shapes perceptions of minority communities and contributes to processes of inclusion and exclusion (17, 18). Such findings underscore the importance of examining literature not only as a reflection of society but also as a site where competing narratives and ideological positions are negotiated. Through critical engagement

with these narratives, students can develop a deeper understanding of how language participates in the construction of social reality.

The theoretical foundations of critical literacy emphasize precisely this relationship between discourse, power, and social transformation. Critical literacy scholars argue that texts are never neutral. Instead, they embody particular values, assumptions, and perspectives that privilege certain voices while marginalizing others. Readers therefore need opportunities to examine how texts position individuals and groups, whose interests are served by particular representations, and what alternative interpretations might be possible (1-3). Such inquiry aligns closely with critical discourse perspectives, which view language as a social practice deeply connected to structures of power and ideology. Critical discourse analysis provides valuable tools for examining how literary texts represent violence, construct identities, and normalize or challenge social inequalities (19). When applied within educational settings, these approaches encourage students to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward more sophisticated forms of analysis and reflection.

The educational significance of critical literacy has become increasingly important in Pakistan, where English occupies a unique and often contested position. English functions simultaneously as a global language, a medium of educational advancement, and a marker of social privilege. The teaching of English literature therefore occurs within broader debates about language policy, cultural identity, educational equity, and globalization (20, 21). Recent research suggests that educational practices in Pakistan continue to be shaped by examination-oriented approaches that emphasize memorization and textual reproduction rather than critical engagement and independent analysis (21). Consequently, many students encounter literary texts primarily as objects of assessment rather than as opportunities for intellectual inquiry and social reflection.

These challenges are further complicated when literary texts address controversial or sensitive topics. Teachers may hesitate to engage deeply with themes such as violence, gender inequality, religious conflict, or political oppression because of cultural sensitivities, institutional constraints, or concerns about classroom management. Research on teaching sensitive topics in Pakistani classrooms highlights the difficulties educators face when facilitating discussions around controversial issues while maintaining a respectful and productive learning environment (22). As a result, literary representations of violence are sometimes simplified, depoliticized, or avoided altogether, limiting their potential contribution to critical literacy development.

Nevertheless, the educational potential of literary violence should not be underestimated. Representations of suffering, injustice, conflict, and resistance can provoke emotional responses that serve as starting points for deeper critical inquiry. When students encounter narratives that challenge their assumptions, expose hidden forms of oppression, or present unfamiliar perspectives, they may begin to question dominant social narratives and develop greater awareness of structural inequalities. Literature can therefore function as a bridge between personal experience and broader social analysis, helping learners connect textual interpretation with ethical reflection and civic engagement (1, 3, 4).

Contemporary studies of literary and cultural representation provide further evidence of this potential. Research exploring environmental destruction in Pakistani fiction demonstrates how literary narratives reveal hidden forms of violence against communities and ecosystems while encouraging readers to reconsider relationships between humans, nature, and development (23). Investigations of feminist themes in Pakistani literature similarly show how literary texts challenge dominant gender ideologies and promote alternative understandings of social relations (11, 24). Studies examining linguistic imperialism and educational discourse reveal how texts may reproduce or resist forms of cultural domination, highlighting the importance of critical reading practices within educational settings (25, 26). Together, these findings suggest that literary texts provide powerful opportunities for cultivating critical literacy because they expose readers to multiple perspectives, conflicting narratives, and complex social realities.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, significant gaps remain in understanding the specific relationship between literary representations of violence and critical literacy development in educational contexts. Existing studies have examined Pakistani literature from historical, postcolonial, feminist, cultural, and discourse-analytic perspectives, yet relatively little attention has been devoted to how students engage with representations of violence as part of the process of becoming critically literate readers (7, 9, 18). Similarly, while critical literacy theory has generated extensive discussion regarding the role of texts in shaping social consciousness, few studies have investigated how violent literary narratives may function as pedagogical resources within Pakistani educational settings (2, 3). The absence of such research is particularly notable given the centrality of violence to both Pakistani history and contemporary literary production.

Furthermore, broader developments in qualitative and interpretive research have emphasized the importance of understanding educational phenomena within their social, cultural, and institutional contexts (27). Literature classrooms are not isolated spaces; they are embedded within larger systems of governance, authority, ideology, and cultural practice. The culture of power operating within Pakistani society and educational institutions influences how texts are selected, taught, discussed, and interpreted (28). Consequently, investigating the relationship between literary violence and critical literacy requires attention not only to textual representations but also to the educational contexts in which those representations are encountered and negotiated.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship further highlights the continuing relevance of violence, memory, and identity in South Asian cultural production. Studies examining the psychological and humanistic dimensions of partition underscore the enduring influence of historical trauma on collective consciousness and narrative expression (29). Literary works addressing displacement, loss, and conflict continue to shape understandings of national identity and social belonging across generations (15, 16). Even creative literary productions themselves continue to explore themes of memory, suffering, and human resilience, reflecting the ongoing significance of violence within contemporary literary imagination (30). These developments reinforce the need to examine how educational engagement with such narratives may contribute to critical forms of reading and social understanding.

Given these considerations, there is a clear need for research that systematically investigates how literary representations of violence in Pakistani English literature can contribute to the development of critical literacy in educational contexts and how this relationship may be conceptualized within a coherent pedagogical model. Therefore, the aim of this study is to model the relationship between literary representations of violence and the development of critical literacy in education through an analysis of Pakistani English literature and its pedagogical implications.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive and critical paradigm to examine how literary representations of violence in Pakistani English literature contribute to the development of critical literacy in educational contexts. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand meanings, interpretations, ideological structures, and pedagogical processes rather than measure predetermined variables statistically. The research focused on the ways in which violence is constructed in selected literary texts and how such representations may encourage learners to question power, inequality, marginalization, gender oppression, political conflict, and social injustice. Accordingly, the study was designed as a qualitative literary-educational inquiry combining close textual analysis with pedagogical interpretation. The main sources of data consisted of selected Pakistani English literary texts that contain prominent representations of violence, conflict, trauma, oppression, displacement, or social exclusion. These texts were selected purposively because of their relevance to the research problem, their thematic engagement with different forms of violence,

and their potential to stimulate critical discussion in educational settings. The selected sources included contemporary Pakistani English novels and short stories in which violence appears not only as a narrative event but also as a social, political, cultural, and ideological phenomenon. In addition to the literary corpus, the study also considered educational materials, classroom-based responses, and interpretive reflections related to the teaching of these texts in English literature education. The sampling strategy was therefore purposive and criterion-based, with the central criteria being the Pakistani English literary context, the explicit or implicit representation of violence, and the pedagogical relevance of the text for developing critical literacy.

Data were collected through qualitative tools designed to capture both textual meanings and educational implications. The first tool was a textual analysis protocol developed to guide the close reading of the selected Pakistani English literary works. This protocol focused on identifying narrative strategies, representations of violence, forms of power, character positioning, symbolic imagery, silences, omissions, ideological tensions, and the relationship between individual suffering and broader social structures. Through this tool, the researcher examined how violence was represented linguistically, aesthetically, and discursively, and how these representations could encourage readers to move beyond literal comprehension toward critical interpretation. The second tool was a document and pedagogical review checklist used to examine the educational relevance of the selected texts, especially in relation to critical literacy goals. This checklist helped organize information about the themes of violence, the possible classroom questions generated by the texts, the socio-political issues embedded in the narratives, and the extent to which the texts could support critical reflection on identity, justice, authority, resistance, and ethical responsibility. Where classroom-based inquiry was applicable, an observation guide was also used to record how teachers and students engaged with violent literary content during discussion. This guide focused on the types of questions raised, the degree of student participation, the depth of critical engagement, and the extent to which classroom dialogue moved from plot-level understanding to ideological and social analysis. Semi-structured interview prompts or reflective response questions were also used to collect interpretive data from teachers and students regarding their perceptions of literary violence, their emotional and analytical responses to the selected texts, and their understanding of how literature may develop critical awareness. These tools provided rich qualitative data by connecting textual interpretation with educational practice.

The collected data were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis supported by critical discourse-oriented interpretation. The analysis began with repeated reading of the selected literary texts and related educational data in order to develop familiarity with the corpus and identify significant representations of violence. Initial codes were generated around recurring textual and pedagogical patterns, including structural violence, symbolic violence, gendered oppression, political conflict, trauma, silence, resistance, marginalization, ideology, empathy, ethical judgment, and critical questioning. These codes were then organized into broader themes that explained how literary violence functions as a site for developing critical literacy. Attention was given not only to what forms of violence were represented, but also to how they were narrated, whose voices were centered or silenced, what social structures were exposed, and how readers were positioned to interpret suffering, injustice, and power. In the educational dimension of the analysis, student and teacher responses were examined to determine whether engagement with violent literary content remained at the level of emotional reaction and moral judgment or developed into deeper critical literacy practices such as questioning dominant assumptions, recognizing hidden power relations, identifying ideological bias, and connecting literary events to broader social realities. The final stage of analysis involved modeling the relationship between literary representations of violence and critical literacy development. This model interpreted literary violence as a pedagogical catalyst that may lead learners from affective response to contextual understanding, from contextual understanding to ideological analysis, and from ideological analysis to ethical and civic awareness. To enhance trustworthiness, the study relied on triangulation across textual sources, pedagogical materials, and interpretive responses, while maintaining reflexivity throughout the analytical process. The analysis therefore produced a coherent qualitative explanation

of how Pakistani English literature can be used not merely for literary appreciation, but as a critical educational resource for cultivating socially aware, reflective, and analytically engaged readers.

Findings and Results

The qualitative field component of the study included 32 participants who were directly connected to the reading, teaching, or interpretation of Pakistani English literature in educational settings. Of these participants, 24 were students enrolled in English literature or English language education programs, and 8 were teachers who had experience teaching Pakistani English literary texts at the secondary, college, or university level. Among the student participants, 14 were female and 10 were male, with ages ranging from 19 to 26 years. Most of the students were undergraduate learners in English literature programs, while a smaller number were postgraduate students with prior exposure to literary theory, postcolonial studies, or critical pedagogy. Among the teacher participants, 5 were female and 3 were male, with teaching experience ranging from 4 to 18 years. All teacher participants had taught literary texts containing themes of violence, trauma, social conflict, gender oppression, or political instability. In addition to participant-based data, the study analyzed selected Pakistani English literary texts that prominently represented violence in social, political, gendered, symbolic, or structural forms. The demographic and academic profile of the participants indicated that the sample was suitable for examining how literary violence is interpreted in educational settings and how such interpretations may contribute to the development of critical literacy.

Table 1. Emergent Themes on the Relationship Between Literary Violence and Critical Literacy Development

Main Theme	Representation in Pakistani English Literature	Critical Literacy Process Identified	Educational Meaning
Structural violence and institutional power	Violence was frequently represented through systems of authority, including policing, state power, class hierarchy, religious control, and social exclusion. The texts did not present violence only as isolated physical harm, but as a condition embedded in social and institutional arrangements.	Students began to identify that violence could be produced by systems rather than only by individual characters. This encouraged them to move from plot-based interpretation to structural questioning.	Literary texts helped learners recognize that injustice may operate through normalized institutions, traditions, and discourses. This finding shows that representations of violence can support critical literacy by encouraging students to question how power is organized in society.
Gendered violence and patriarchal control	Several texts represented women's experiences of restriction, fear, silencing, domestic control, reputational anxiety, and symbolic domination. Violence appeared not only in explicit acts but also in everyday social expectations imposed on female characters.	Students, especially female students, connected these representations to broader questions of gender inequality, social control, and cultural norms. They began to question how literature exposes patriarchal structures.	The classroom discussion of gendered violence created opportunities for students to interpret literature as a critique of social norms. This theme strengthened critical literacy by linking textual analysis with ethical reflection on gender justice.
Silence, absence, and marginalized voices	The analyzed texts often constructed violence through what remained unsaid, who was denied voice, and whose suffering was narrated indirectly. Silences around victims, minorities, women, and socially powerless groups became important interpretive signs.	Students learned to ask whose perspective was missing, whose experience was minimized, and how narrative voice shaped the reader's understanding of violence.	This theme demonstrated that critical literacy develops when students learn to read beyond explicit content and examine omissions, silences, and narrative exclusions.
Affective disturbance as the beginning of critique	Violent scenes initially produced emotional responses such as shock, sadness, anger, discomfort, sympathy, or moral condemnation. Students often began by responding emotionally before engaging analytically.	With teacher guidance, emotional responses were gradually transformed into critical questions about cause, responsibility, ideology, and social structure.	The findings show that emotional disturbance is not separate from critical literacy; rather, it can become the first stage of critical engagement when supported by reflective pedagogy.
Ideological normalization of violence	Some texts showed how violence becomes ordinary through language, tradition, nationalism, class privilege, religious justification, or social silence. Violence was often made acceptable through dominant cultural narratives.	Students began to examine how language and social discourse can normalize harm. They questioned why certain forms of suffering are accepted as natural, necessary, or unavoidable.	This theme indicated that literature can reveal the ideological mechanisms through which societies justify violence. Such recognition is central to critical literacy because it helps learners challenge common-sense assumptions.
Resistance, agency, and ethical awareness	The texts also represented characters who resisted oppression, questioned authority, remembered trauma, or attempted to speak against injustice. Even when resistance was limited, it opened interpretive possibilities.	Students identified moments of agency and connected them to broader questions of responsibility, civic awareness, and moral choice.	Literary representations of violence did not lead only to despair; they also enabled students to imagine alternative positions of critique, resistance, and ethical responsibility.

Table 1 shows that literary representations of violence in Pakistani English literature generated multiple forms of critical engagement. The most significant finding was that violence was not interpreted merely as a dramatic event or narrative device; rather, it became a means through which students could understand the relationship between language, power, identity, and social injustice. The theme of structural violence was particularly important because it encouraged participants to move beyond individual explanations of cruelty and examine how institutions, traditions, and dominant ideologies produce or sustain harm. Similarly, gendered violence helped students connect literary interpretation with lived social realities, especially where texts represented women's vulnerability, restriction, and silencing. Another important finding was that students developed critical literacy not only by analyzing what was explicitly represented, but also by examining what was absent, hidden, or silenced in the narrative. This ability to identify omissions and marginalized voices indicates a deeper level of critical reading. The table also demonstrates that students' emotional responses to violent content were not obstacles to learning; instead, when guided through discussion, these responses became entry points into critical inquiry. Overall, the emergent themes suggest that Pakistani English literature has strong pedagogical potential for developing critical literacy because it enables students to question normalized violence, interrogate dominant social assumptions, and connect literary analysis with ethical and civic reflection.

Table 2. Patterns of Critical Literacy Observed Across Textual Analysis, Classroom Interaction, and Participant Responses

Analytical Category	Evidence from Literary Texts	Evidence from Classroom Interaction	Evidence from Student and Teacher Responses
Movement from literal comprehension to critical interpretation	Texts presented violence through complex narrative strategies such as fragmented narration, shifting voice, irony, silence, and symbolic imagery. These techniques required readers to interpret meanings beyond the surface level.	At the beginning of discussions, students often focused on plot, characters, and emotional reactions. With guided questioning, they began to analyze the social causes and ideological meanings of violence.	Students reported that they initially understood violent scenes as tragic events but later recognized them as representations of larger problems such as inequality, authoritarianism, patriarchy, or social exclusion.
Recognition of power relations	Literary texts repeatedly connected violence with unequal relations between men and women, rich and poor, state and citizen, majority and minority, or powerful and powerless groups.	Teachers who used critical prompts encouraged students to ask who benefits from violence, who is silenced, and how authority is represented in the narrative.	Teachers stated that literary violence became pedagogically valuable when it was linked to questions of power, discourse, and social responsibility rather than treated only as sensitive content.
Development of ideological questioning	The texts often showed how violence is justified through national, religious, cultural, familial, or moral language. This made ideology visible within narrative discourse.	Classroom discussions became more critical when students examined how language normalizes violence or presents oppression as tradition, duty, honor, security, or morality.	Students explained that the texts helped them question ideas they had previously considered normal, especially regarding gender roles, obedience to authority, and social hierarchy.
Ethical and emotional engagement	Violent representations generated empathy, discomfort, anger, and moral concern. These emotions created strong reader involvement.	When teachers allowed reflective discussion, students used their emotional reactions to ask deeper questions about responsibility, justice, and human suffering.	Participants emphasized that violent literary content was difficult but meaningful because it made them think about real social problems rather than treating literature as detached from life.
Constraints on critical discussion	Some texts contained politically or culturally sensitive material that could challenge dominant narratives.	In some observed discussions, teachers avoided controversial dimensions of violence and redirected attention toward theme, character, or style.	Teachers acknowledged that institutional expectations, examination pressure, and fear of controversy sometimes limited open critical discussion of violence.
Transformation into critical literacy	Literary representations of violence opened space for questioning social structures, dominant narratives, and the politics of representation.	Students demonstrated critical literacy when they moved from asking "what happened?" to asking "why did it happen?", "who controls the narrative?", and "what social structure allows this violence?"	Participants indicated that literature helped them become more analytical, socially aware, and reflective when classroom instruction encouraged interpretation, dialogue, and contextualization.

Table 2 indicates that the development of critical literacy was not automatic but depended on the interaction between textual complexity, teacher mediation, and student response. The literary texts provided rich material for critical literacy because they represented violence through layered narrative techniques rather than simple descriptive realism. However, students did not

always begin with critical interpretations. Their initial responses were often literal, emotional, or moralistic, focusing on the suffering of characters, the cruelty of specific individuals, or the sadness of violent events. The shift toward critical literacy occurred when classroom discussion encouraged them to examine violence as a product of power relations, ideological language, and social structures. This finding is important because it shows that the pedagogical value of violent literary content depends on how it is framed in educational practice. When teachers used open-ended and critical questions, students began to identify hidden assumptions, silenced voices, normalized hierarchies, and institutional sources of violence. When teachers avoided sensitive issues, however, students' interpretations remained narrower and less critical. The table therefore shows that literary violence becomes educationally meaningful when it is connected to critical questioning, contextual analysis, and ethical reflection. Pakistani English literature can support critical literacy most effectively when teachers help students move from emotional response to social analysis and from textual interpretation to civic awareness.

Table 3. Proposed Model of Critical Literacy Development Through Literary Representations of Violence

Stage of the Model	Description of the Stage	Student Response Observed	Pedagogical Function
Affective encounter with violence	Students first encounter violent content as disturbing, painful, shocking, or morally troubling. At this stage, their attention is mainly directed toward characters, events, and emotional impact.	Students expressed sadness, anger, discomfort, sympathy, or moral judgment. Their comments often focused on the victim, the aggressor, or the immediate event of violence.	This stage creates emotional involvement and motivates students to engage with the text. It provides the initial energy for deeper interpretation but requires guidance to avoid remaining at the level of shock or pity.
Contextual understanding	Students begin to place violent events within historical, cultural, political, gendered, or institutional contexts. Violence is no longer seen only as an individual act but as part of a wider social condition.	Students started connecting literary events to issues such as patriarchy, class inequality, political repression, sectarian conflict, social silence, or cultural control.	This stage helps students understand that literature represents social realities and that violence must be interpreted in relation to context, history, and power.
Discursive and ideological analysis	Students examine how language, narrative voice, silence, metaphor, symbolism, and perspective construct meanings of violence. They begin to ask how texts represent, justify, conceal, or challenge violence.	Students questioned whose voice was heard, whose suffering was ignored, how authority was represented, and how certain words or images made violence appear normal or acceptable.	This stage is central to critical literacy because it enables students to read against the grain and analyze how discourse shapes social perception.
Ethical positioning	Students move from analysis toward ethical reflection. They consider their own position as readers and citizens and reflect on responsibility, justice, empathy, and social awareness.	Students expressed more reflective interpretations, asking what society should learn from such narratives and how readers should respond to injustice.	This stage connects literary reading with moral and civic consciousness. It transforms interpretation into reflective judgment.
Critical literacy formation	Students demonstrate the ability to question dominant narratives, recognize hidden power relations, identify silences, interpret ideology, and connect literature to broader social realities.	Students moved beyond summary and emotional reaction toward analytical, contextual, and socially aware readings of the texts.	This final stage represents the educational outcome of the model. Literary representations of violence become a resource for developing critical, reflective, and socially responsible readers.

Table 3 presents the model that emerged from the findings of the study. The model explains critical literacy development as a gradual process that begins with emotional encounter and develops into contextual, ideological, ethical, and critical awareness. The first stage, affective encounter, was evident in nearly all student responses, as violent literary content initially produced strong emotional reactions. However, the findings show that affect alone was insufficient for critical literacy. Students needed pedagogical support to move from emotional response to contextual understanding. In the second stage, students began to interpret violence in relation to social and historical conditions, recognizing that literary violence often reflects broader realities such as gender inequality, political domination, class hierarchy, and cultural exclusion. The third stage, discursive and ideological analysis, was the most significant for critical literacy because students began to question how language and narrative structure shape the meaning of violence. They asked whose voices were privileged, whose experiences were erased, and how certain forms of harm became normalized. The fourth stage involved ethical positioning, in which students reflected on their own responsibilities as readers and citizens. The final stage, critical literacy formation, occurred when students demonstrated the capacity to connect literary interpretation with social critique. This model shows that literary representations of violence

can become powerful educational resources when they are not treated as disturbing content to be avoided, but as complex cultural texts that require guided interpretation. The findings therefore suggest that Pakistani English literature can play a meaningful role in critical literacy education by helping learners read violence not only as an event in fiction, but as a representation of power, ideology, and social reality.

Table 4. Pedagogical Conditions That Supported or Limited Critical Literacy Development

Pedagogical Condition	How It Supported Critical Literacy	How It Limited Critical Literacy When Absent or Weak	Overall Interpretation
Dialogic classroom discussion	Open discussion allowed students to express emotional, cultural, and analytical responses. It encouraged multiple interpretations and helped students compare different perspectives.	When discussion was teacher-dominated, students remained passive and tended to repeat expected interpretations rather than develop independent critical readings.	Critical literacy was strongest when classrooms functioned as dialogic spaces rather than lecture-based environments.
Critical questioning by teachers	Questions about power, silence, ideology, representation, and social context helped students move beyond plot summary and moral judgment.	When teachers asked only factual or examination-oriented questions, students focused on character, theme, and story without deeper social analysis.	Teacher questioning played a decisive role in transforming literary violence into a critical literacy resource.
Contextualization of violence	Historical, political, cultural, and gender-based contextualization helped students understand violence as structural and socially produced.	Without contextualization, violence was interpreted as personal tragedy, individual cruelty, or isolated misfortune.	Contextual framing was necessary for students to recognize the broader social meanings of violent representation.
Safe engagement with sensitive topics	A respectful classroom atmosphere enabled students to discuss difficult issues such as gendered violence, state power, religious conflict, and social injustice.	Fear of controversy, cultural sensitivity, or institutional pressure sometimes led to silence, avoidance, or superficial treatment of violent content.	Critical literacy required both intellectual openness and emotional safety.
Connection between text and lived reality	Students developed stronger critical awareness when they connected literary events to social problems, personal observations, or national realities.	When literature was treated as separate from life, students approached it only as an academic object and did not fully engage with its social implications.	Literature became pedagogically powerful when students were encouraged to relate textual meaning to real-world structures and experiences.
Access to critical vocabulary	Concepts such as power, ideology, discourse, patriarchy, marginalization, resistance, and structural violence helped students articulate complex interpretations.	Students without critical vocabulary often recognized injustice emotionally but struggled to express it analytically.	Critical literacy development required not only exposure to texts but also access to interpretive language and analytical tools.

Table 4 shows that the development of critical literacy was shaped by specific pedagogical conditions. The most important condition was dialogic classroom discussion, because students needed opportunities to speak, question, disagree, interpret, and reflect. When classroom interaction was open and participatory, students produced more complex readings of violence and were more likely to connect literary representation with social critique. Critical questioning by teachers was also central. Students moved toward deeper analysis when teachers asked questions about ideology, silence, power, and representation. In contrast, when questions were limited to plot, theme, or examination preparation, students' responses remained descriptive. Contextualization was another essential condition because violent content could easily be misunderstood as isolated tragedy unless students were guided to examine historical, cultural, and institutional causes. The findings also show that sensitive topics require a safe learning environment. Students were more willing to discuss difficult issues when they felt respected and when teachers framed disagreement as part of learning. Finally, access to critical vocabulary was necessary for transforming emotional recognition into analytical interpretation. Some students could feel that a scene was unjust but lacked the conceptual language to explain how the injustice was connected to power, ideology, or structure. Overall, Table 4 confirms that literary representations of violence support critical literacy only when appropriate pedagogical conditions are present. The text provides the opportunity for critique, but classroom practice determines whether that opportunity becomes meaningful learning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to model the relationship between literary representations of violence and the development of critical literacy in educational contexts through an examination of Pakistani English literature. The findings demonstrated that violence within Pakistani literary narratives functions not merely as a thematic element or narrative device but as a complex discursive mechanism through which issues of power, inequality, identity, exclusion, resistance, and social justice are constructed and contested. One of the most significant findings was that students gradually shifted from literal and emotionally driven interpretations of violent events toward more critical understandings that connected violence to broader social, political, cultural, and institutional structures. This finding supports the central assumptions of critical literacy theory, which argues that meaningful reading involves questioning how texts position readers, represent social groups, and reproduce or challenge systems of power (1-3). The progression observed in the participants' responses indicates that literary violence can become a catalyst for critical inquiry when learners are encouraged to move beyond plot comprehension and moral judgment toward ideological analysis and social reflection.

The findings further revealed that violence in Pakistani English literature is frequently represented as structural rather than purely individual. Participants increasingly recognized that the violence depicted in literary texts often originated from broader systems of governance, social hierarchy, patriarchy, nationalism, religious extremism, and institutional exclusion. This observation aligns with previous scholarship emphasizing that Pakistani literature frequently explores the relationship between personal suffering and collective socio-political realities. Rahman's examination of Pakistani literary traditions highlighted how narratives repeatedly engage with issues of historical conflict, political instability, and social fragmentation (7, 8). Similarly, Talbot's analysis of Pakistan's modern history demonstrates that experiences of conflict, displacement, and social tension have profoundly influenced cultural production and collective memory (6). The present findings suggest that literary texts provide students with opportunities to critically examine these realities, thereby transforming literature classrooms into spaces where broader questions of justice, citizenship, and power can be explored.

Another important finding was the central role of gendered violence in stimulating critical literacy development. Participants frequently identified patriarchal structures, social restrictions imposed upon women, and normalized forms of gender-based oppression within the selected literary texts. Female students, in particular, demonstrated heightened awareness of the ways in which violence operates through cultural expectations, symbolic exclusion, and social control. These findings are consistent with recent studies that have examined gender representation within Pakistani literary and media discourse. Sahar and colleagues found that literary narratives often position women as marginalized subjects whose experiences reveal deeper structures of patriarchal authority (11). Likewise, Bibi and Doering demonstrated that Pakistani literary texts expose complex dynamics of gender, identity, and social power through their portrayals of women and children (12). Similar patterns have been identified in analyses of newspaper discourse and media representation, where gender inequality is often reproduced through subtle discursive practices (13, 14). The present study extends this body of literature by showing that students are capable of critically identifying these mechanisms when educational environments encourage reflective discussion and analytical engagement.

The findings also indicated that critical literacy development was closely associated with students' ability to identify silences, omissions, and marginalized voices within literary narratives. Participants increasingly questioned whose perspectives were absent, whose experiences remained unrepresented, and how narrative structures privileged certain viewpoints while excluding others. Such findings directly support critical literacy frameworks that emphasize reading beyond explicit textual content to examine underlying assumptions and power relations (1, 3). Critical discourse analysis similarly argues that meaning

is often produced not only through what is stated but also through what remains unsaid, making silence itself an important site of ideological struggle (19). The participants' ability to interrogate omissions within literary texts suggests that exposure to complex narratives of violence can foster sophisticated interpretive skills that extend beyond conventional literary analysis.

The study additionally found that emotional engagement served as an important entry point into critical literacy. Violent scenes initially generated strong affective responses including sadness, anger, discomfort, empathy, and moral concern. However, these emotional reactions did not remain static. Through guided discussion and contextual analysis, students gradually transformed emotional responses into critical questions regarding responsibility, justice, authority, and social inequality. This finding supports Comber's argument that literacy education should connect personal experience and emotional engagement with broader social inquiry (4). Rather than viewing emotional responses as obstacles to critical analysis, the findings suggest that affective engagement can motivate deeper intellectual exploration when supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies. Such a process aligns closely with educational approaches that seek to integrate emotional awareness, ethical reflection, and critical thinking within literacy instruction.

The findings further highlighted the significance of discourse in shaping understandings of violence. Participants increasingly recognized how language, symbolism, narrative voice, and ideological framing influenced their interpretations of violent events. They became more aware of how violence can be normalized, justified, or concealed through specific discursive practices. This observation strongly aligns with Fairclough's conception of discourse as a social practice through which power relations are reproduced and contested (19). Similar insights emerge from studies of minority representation, nationalism, and ideological conflict within Pakistani discourse. Research examining ethnic and religious representation in media demonstrates how language contributes to processes of inclusion and exclusion (17). Likewise, Khan and colleagues showed that literary narratives frequently construct social identities through oppositional discourses that reinforce or challenge dominant ideological frameworks (18). The current study suggests that critical engagement with literary violence enables students to recognize these processes and develop greater awareness of how discourse shapes social reality.

A particularly important finding concerned the pedagogical conditions necessary for transforming literary violence into a resource for critical literacy. The data indicated that critical literacy did not emerge automatically from exposure to violent content. Rather, its development depended heavily upon dialogic classroom practices, critical questioning, contextualization, and opportunities for reflective discussion. Where teachers encouraged students to interrogate assumptions, consider alternative perspectives, and connect literary events to social realities, critical literacy outcomes were substantially stronger. Conversely, when instruction focused primarily on examination preparation or literary appreciation, critical engagement remained limited. These findings correspond with broader observations regarding English education in Pakistan. Coleman argued that educational practices often reflect broader social and institutional priorities rather than critical pedagogical goals (20). Similarly, Shamim and Sarwar noted that English language and literature instruction frequently remains constrained by examination-oriented systems that prioritize memorization over critical inquiry (21). The present findings suggest that realizing the transformative potential of literature requires pedagogical approaches that deliberately cultivate critical engagement.

The influence of institutional and ideological contexts also emerged as a significant factor shaping classroom discussions. Some teachers reported avoiding controversial issues related to politics, religion, nationalism, or state authority due to concerns regarding sensitivity, institutional expectations, or potential conflict. This finding echoes Shakil's observations regarding the challenges associated with teaching sensitive topics in Pakistani educational settings (22). Similar concerns are evident in studies of educational discourse and language policy, which highlight the complex intersections between education, power, and ideological regulation (25, 26). Consequently, the findings suggest that critical literacy development requires not only effective teaching strategies but also supportive institutional environments that permit open dialogue and intellectual exploration.

The study additionally contributes to growing scholarship on identity, memory, and postcolonial experience within Pakistani literature. Participants frequently connected literary representations of violence to broader historical experiences such as partition, displacement, and national identity formation. These observations align with recent research examining postcolonial identity reconstruction and the enduring influence of historical trauma on literary production (15, 29). Similarly, Salman's analysis of fictional responses to historical events demonstrates how literary narratives challenge official histories and provide alternative perspectives on collective memory (16). The present findings indicate that engagement with such narratives can enhance students' awareness of the relationship between personal experience, historical memory, and social discourse.

Environmental and cultural dimensions of violence also emerged within the findings. Some participants recognized forms of ecological destruction, cultural marginalization, and symbolic violence that extended beyond direct physical harm. These observations correspond with Mir and Azmi's analysis of environmental crisis and ecocide in Pakistani fiction, which demonstrates how literary texts expose hidden forms of violence affecting both human and non-human communities (23). Such findings broaden traditional understandings of violence and further illustrate the capacity of literature to stimulate multidimensional critical reflection.

Overall, the findings support the view that Pakistani English literature possesses considerable potential as a pedagogical resource for critical literacy development. Literary representations of violence encourage students to interrogate power structures, recognize ideological processes, examine marginalized perspectives, and connect textual analysis with broader social concerns. Consistent with contemporary critical literacy theory and postcolonial literary scholarship, the findings demonstrate that literature can function as a powerful educational medium through which learners develop analytical, ethical, and civic forms of awareness (1, 3, 5). The proposed model emerging from this study suggests that critical literacy develops through a progressive movement from emotional engagement to contextual understanding, discourse analysis, ethical reflection, and ultimately critical social awareness.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused specifically on selected examples of Pakistani English literature and therefore may not fully represent the diversity of literary traditions, genres, and linguistic contexts present within Pakistan. Second, the qualitative design emphasized depth of interpretation rather than statistical generalization, limiting the extent to which findings can be generalized to all educational settings. Third, participants were drawn from specific educational contexts, and their experiences may differ from those of students and teachers in other institutions or regions. Finally, the interpretation of literary texts and classroom interactions inevitably involves a degree of researcher subjectivity despite efforts to maintain analytical rigor and trustworthiness.

Future research could expand the scope of investigation by including larger and more diverse participant populations across different educational levels and geographical regions. Comparative studies examining literary violence across different national literatures or educational systems could provide valuable insights into the relationship between cultural context and critical literacy development. Longitudinal research could explore how students' critical literacy skills evolve over time through sustained engagement with literary texts. Additionally, future studies may examine the impact of specific instructional interventions, digital learning environments, or interdisciplinary approaches on students' critical engagement with literary representations of violence.

From a practical perspective, educators should consider integrating critical literacy principles more explicitly into literature instruction. Teachers can encourage deeper engagement with literary texts by creating opportunities for dialogue, questioning dominant assumptions, and connecting literary narratives to contemporary social issues. Curriculum developers should include literary works that address complex themes such as violence, inequality, identity, and social justice while providing pedagogical guidance for facilitating critical discussion. Teacher education programs should also equip educators with the skills necessary

to manage sensitive topics effectively and foster inclusive classroom environments. By adopting such practices, educational institutions can utilize literature not only to develop linguistic and literary competence but also to cultivate reflective, socially aware, and critically engaged citizens.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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