

# Critical Education through DisCrit, LatCrit, and Intersectionality: A Systematic Literature Review on Efforts to Address Social Injustice

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Received: 02/01/2026

Revised: 10/03/2026

Accepted: 19/04/2026

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze and synthesize the application of critical theories systematically, specifically Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), as well as the integration of intersectionality theory in education to address social injustice. The method used is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) by analyzing 23 relevant studies selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria, using articles indexed in the Scopus database published between 2000 and 2022. The results show that DisCrit and LatCrit are effective in creating inclusive learning spaces by addressing race- and disability-based discrimination. In addition, integrating intersectionality theory deepens understanding of students' social experiences influenced by multiple identity factors. This study also found that hope plays an important role in critical education, equipping students with the tools to challenge social injustice and deepen critical awareness. In conclusion, the application of critical theories in education has the potential to strengthen students' social awareness and empower them to participate in social change. This study contributes to the development of a more equitable and inclusive education model and suggests further research that emphasizes teacher training and the long-term impact of critical education.

## Keywords

Critical Education; DisCrit; Expectations; Intersectionality; LatCrit

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical education is an increasingly important approach in modern educational reform, especially in addressing social injustice. This type of education aims to liberate individuals from oppressive social structures by encouraging students to think critically about existing social conditions and their role in change. Social injustice in education is not only evident in terms of access, but also in the way students are treated based on their social identities, such as race, disability, and social class (Connor et al., 2021). However, in many educational contexts, especially for students from racial minorities and students with disabilities, classroom practices are still dominated by traditional, non-critical pedagogy that tends to ignore or even reproduce these inequalities, so that critical education has not been optimally implemented in daily teaching and learning. Therefore, integrating critical theories, such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), is highly relevant to addressing such injustices in education (Migliarini & Stinson, 2021; Franco, 2020). Despite the growing number of theoretical discussions on DisCrit and LatCrit, there remains a lack of systematic mapping



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of how these theories are actually applied in educational practice, creating a gap between theory and classroom implementation (Aloi & Bialka, 2023). This study discusses how applying these two theories can create a more inclusive and fair educational space that empowers students to take action against social injustice.

One important reason for conducting this research is to address the inequalities that still exist in the classroom, where many students from minority groups, whether based on race or disability, are often marginalized. DisCrit, as proposed by (Migliarini & Stinson, 2021). It focuses on applying the principles of social justice and racial equality in education, recognizing students' diverse identities and backgrounds. This approach challenges dominant norms that often ignore disability and race in education, and opens up space for more equitable and inclusive education. Similarly, LatCrit, discussed by (Franco, 2021) Critics the separate approach to cultural competence in education and encourage the use of intersectionality theory to explore students' experiences based on their social identities. Both theories seek to provide students with space to understand and challenge existing injustices and to give them the tools to change oppressive social structures.

The purpose of this study is to explore how these critical theories can be applied in education to overcome existing social injustices, emphasizing the importance of social awareness and student empowerment (Siuty, 2022). This study also aims to examine the role of hope in critical education as a factor that can change students' social awareness and encourage them to take action against social injustice. Hope, according to the theory developed by (Ichikawa, 2020) It is an important element in critical education because it can motivate individuals to fight for social change. Hope integrated into critical education not only provides motivation but also leads to collective action to achieve more inclusive and equitable social change (Annamma, 2022). In addition, this study seeks to examine how integrating intersectionality theory into social education can enhance students' understanding of diverse social experiences and help them reflect on how social injustice affects their lives.

This research is highly relevant to existing literature, especially in the context of more inclusive and reflective critical education. Various previous studies, such as those by Franco (2021), Ichikawa (2020), and Migliarini & Stinson (2021), show that education should not only teach technical or cultural knowledge but also introduce students to critical concepts about social injustice and how they can play a role in change. This study also continues the discussion on how education should be empowered to help students understand their world more deeply and become agents of change in a more just society. Thus, this study aims to further contribute to the development of critical education by empowering students to fight social injustice through the application of DisCrit, LatCrit, and intersectional theories.

## 2. METHODS

The research method used in this study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which aims to identify, assess, and synthesize literature on the development of critical education, particularly the integration of critical theories such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) in social education. The research design was descriptive and analytical, involving the stages of identification, screening, and selection of literature using a systematic approach. The process began by identifying articles using relevant keywords, such as "Effective Teaching Methods," "Critical Theory Education," and "Pedagogy Critical Theory," in the Scopus database (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4), focusing on articles published between 2015 and 2025. At this stage, 781 articles were identified; after screening for duplicates, irrelevant articles, and those without abstracts, 256 remained for further assessment. The articles were then assessed for eligibility based on inclusion criteria, including those discussing critical theories in education and the application of intersectionality and hope concepts in the context of social education. A total of 23 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final review. Of the 256 articles considered, 28 articles initially met the inclusion criteria and were included in the

preliminary review. After a more detailed quality appraisal, 5 articles were excluded due to methodological limitations, leaving 23 studies for the final synthesis.

The main research instrument was an assessment form that evaluated the study's feasibility, covering aspects such as topic relevance, methodological quality, and its contribution to critical education theory. The data collection procedure involved reviewing the abstracts, methodologies, and main findings of the included articles. The analysis method used was thematic analysis, in which the data from the selected articles were grouped and analyzed according to relevant theoretical categories, such as DisCrit, LatCrit, and intersectionality. This analysis was conducted descriptively to synthesize findings from various studies and to provide insights into how the application of these critical theories can influence social education, as well as into how hope can empower students to overcome social injustice in education.

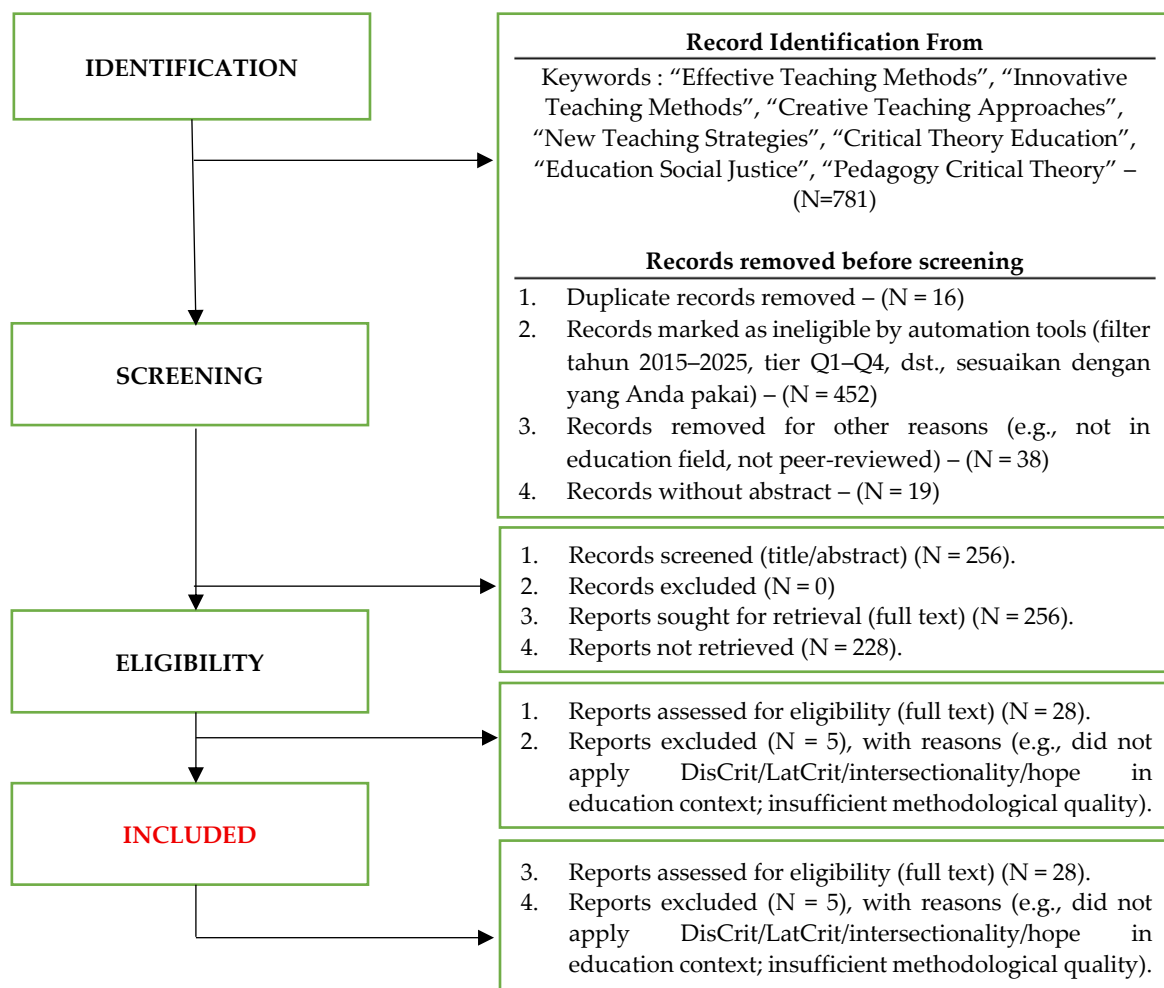


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Study Selection

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Findings

Of the 23 studies analyzed, most discussed the application of various critical theories in education to address social injustice. A total of 12 studies highlighted the application of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), which has proven effective in addressing discrimination experienced by students with disabilities and racial minorities in the classroom. In addition, 8 studies discussed the application of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Friedman & Armineh E. Hallaran, 2022), which integrates the

concept of intersectionality to explore in greater depth the experiences of students from Latino ethnic backgrounds who are often marginalized in the education system. A total of 14 studies also discussed integrating intersectionality theory into the education curriculum, enabling students to understand how social identity factors, such as race, gender, and disability, influence their life experiences. Furthermore, 10 studies highlighted the role of hope in critical education, demonstrating how it can encourage students to see themselves as agents of change in society. In addition, 12 other studies found that critical education has a significant impact on students' social awareness, helping them recognize social injustices in their environment and engage in actions to create change. Overall, these studies affirm the importance of a critical approach in education for building social awareness, empowering students, and encouraging them to play an active role in fighting for social justice.

**Table 1.** Synthesis Matrix (PRISMA Method)

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
Sex and the Social Order: Creative Approaches to Teaching the History of Gender and Sexuality in Modern Britain	(Harrison et al., 2025)	Social and gender history theory	Creative research-based teaching approaches with a focus on public research projects	Enhancing student engagement and creativity through relevant and personalized assignments	This research is relevant to the development of critical education because it emphasizes the importance of creativity and critical thinking through original research.
Innovative Methods and Approaches of Teaching English as a Second Language: An Overview	(Shaniga & Ilankumaran, 2024)	Second language learning theory and student-centered approaches	A survey of 50 ESL teachers using a questionnaire to collect data on the effectiveness of new methods	Found that student-centered approaches and technology-based methods improve ESL learning outcomes	This research aligns with the development of critical education as it emphasizes the importance of approaches that actively engage students and enhance critical thinking skills.
A Study of Innovative Teaching Methods in Higher Education for Digital Localization	(Liu, 2024)	Recommendation system theory and digital education	Experiment with class division into two groups (experimental and control), and questionnaires to analyze results	Knowledge-based recommendation systems improve learning efficiency and student self-control	Related to critical education because it can optimize learning through a technological approach and recommendations that support students' critical and reflective thinking.

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
Student Involvement and Innovative Teaching Methods in a Biophilic Design Education Pilot	(Özbey & Denerel, 2024)	Biophilic design theory and participatory learning approaches	Case study on an elective course with interviews and participatory observation	Demonstrating increased student engagement and course sustainability through innovative approaches	Relevance to critical education through increased student active engagement and the development of creativity and environmental awareness in the context of space design.
Constructivism Learning Theory: A Paradigm for Students' Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Problem Solving	(Almulla, 2023)	Constructivism Theory	Quantitative research using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with 297 students	Creativity and critical thinking have a positive influence on problem-solving abilities and academic achievement	This research is highly relevant to the development of critical education as it highlights the importance of critical thinking and creativity in academic achievement.
Science teaching approach Ethno-SETSaR to improve pre-service teachers' creative thinking and problem-solving skills	(Winarto et al., 2022)	Ethno-SETSaR	Sequential exploratory mixed method	The Ethno-SETSaR approach enhances pre-service teachers' creative thinking and problem-solving skills.	Relevant to the development of critical education that emphasizes a culture-based and context-based approach.
Towards a racial justice project: oral history methodology, critical race theory, and African American education	(James-Galloway & Turner, 2022)	Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Qualitative analysis with a critical theory approach	Critical race theory and oral history help to understand racial injustice in education.	Related to critical education in the context of race and social injustice.

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
The role of digital readiness, innovative teaching methods in music, art, e-learning, students' satisfaction, and entrepreneur psychological capital as a mediator	(Huang, 2022)	Motivation theory	Survey with structural equation modeling	Digital readiness and entrepreneurial psychological capital enhance e-learning satisfaction.	Can be applied to critical education by linking motivation and digital readiness in the context of critical skill development.
Peer observation of teaching: A feasible and effective method of physician faculty development	(Stockdill et al., 2022)	Adult learning theory, feedback	Qualitative interviews with thematic analysis	Peer observation is effective for improving teaching skills, despite challenges in participation and sustainability.	Relevant to critical education in the context of teaching skill development and feedback provision.
Teaching Bioengineering Using a Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategy	(Obada et al., 2022)	Blended Learning, Active Learning, Problem-based Learning	Experiments with student groups, surveys with questionnaires	The blended learning method improves students' understanding of bioengineering. 80% of students are satisfied with the learning outcomes.	Relevant to critical education because it integrates active approaches into education.
Defining Professional Support by Counselor Education Faculty of Color	(Shillingford et al., 2022)	Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Qualitative, in-depth interviews	Two main themes: culturally responsive mentoring and support for promotion.	Touching on the importance of social and professional support, which is relevant to critical education that addresses marginalization.
Students Transitioning from Primary to Secondary Mathematics Learning	(Matiti, 2024)	Critical Pedagogy, Participatory Action Research (PAR)	Qualitative, participatory action research	Using a participatory approach to empower students in the transition of mathematics learning.	Relevance to critical education, especially in empowering students through a participatory pedagogical approach.

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
Critical Race Theory and Black Marxism: Implications for Higher Education	(Cowley, 2022)	Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Marxism	Theoretical, literature analysis	The connection between race and class in higher education.	Relevant to critical education research, with an in-depth analysis of the relationship between race and class in education.
Breaking Down the Walls of the 'Ivory Tower'	(Laletas et al., 2022)	Transformative Learning, Collaborative Teaching	Qualitative, critical reflection, and semi-structured interviews	Successful teaching partnerships connect theory with practice, enhancing inclusive teaching.	Correlation with critical education in the context of collaboration and inclusive learning that challenges traditional approaches.
The Impact of Teaching Using the STEM Approach on the Development of Creative Thinking	(Jawad & Majeed, n.d.)	STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)	Experimental with a two-group design (control and experimental)	The experimental group using the STEM approach showed improvement in creative thinking and mathematical achievement.	These articles offer insights into the use of critical theory to explore educational inequality, which is relevant to your focus on the development of critical education.
Working from theory: developing the bases of teachers' critical thinking pedagogies through action research	(Hegazy et al., 2021)	Critical Learning Theory	Action Research	Participating teachers developed critical-thinking pedagogies in depth and successfully applied them.	These articles provide insights into the use of critical theory to explore educational inequality, which is relevant to your focus on critical education development.
Sharpening Our Tools: Conducting Medical Education Research Using Critical Theory	(Chow et al., 2021)	Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, Postcolonial Theory	Qualitative with interview data analysis	This study uses critical theory to identify how racial inequality operates in medical education.	These articles offer insights into the use of critical theory to explore educational inequality, which is relevant to your focus on the development of critical education.

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
A critical race theory analysis of transnational student activism, social media counter-stories, and the hegemonic logics of diversity work in higher education	(Robertson, 2020)	Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Social media content analysis and critical discourse analysis	Student activism through social media reveals tensions between diversity policies and students' real experiences.	These articles offer insights into the use of critical theory to explore educational inequality, which is relevant to your focus on the development of critical education.
Rethinking the theory of communities of practice in education: Critical reflection and ethical imagination	(Sarid & Levanon, 2020)	Communities of Practice (CoP), Critical Reflection, Ethical Imagination	The theory of critical reflection and ethical imagination as an addition to CoP theory	The CoP theory can be enhanced by considering critical reflection and ethical imagination in shaping identity through education.	These articles offer insights into the use of critical theory to explore educational inequality, which is relevant to your focus on the development of critical education.
A Disability Critical Race Theory Solidarity Approach to Transform Pedagogy and Classroom Culture in TESOL	(Migliarini & Stinson, 2021)	Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Critical analysis, case study	The authors propose a DisCrit approach in the classroom to support more inclusive English language education and reduce the influence of race and stigma on students' abilities. This approach emphasizes the importance of cultural engagement and translanguaging to enrich students' learning experiences.	Relevant to the development of critical education, as both focus on changing pedagogy to support diversity and inclusivity, as well as critiquing systems that oppress students from certain backgrounds.

Research Title	Author & Year of Publication	Theory Used	Research Method	Research Results	Correlation with Research Conducted
Revisiting cultural diversity in social work education through Latino critical race theory testimonio	(Franco, 2021)	Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Intersectionality, Anti-oppressive Practice (AOP)	Testimonio, personal narrative	The study critiques ineffective models of cultural competence and proposes integrating AOP and intersectionality into the curriculum to address bias and discrimination in education.	It is highly relevant to the development of critical education, which emphasizes reflection on social injustice and the integration of critical theory into education.
A theory of hope in critical pedagogy: An interpretation of Henry Giroux	(Ichikawa, 2020)	Critical Pedagogy, Radical Democracy, Hope	Theoretical, Conceptual Analysis	Hope is a key element in critical pedagogy that enables students to imagine a better world and to strengthen democracy and social change. This study combines ideas from Giroux and Freire to develop a more progressive view of education.	Closely related to critical education that focuses on hope, social change, and fair democratic education, it is highly relevant to the development of education that challenges dominant norms.

Based on Table 1, the 23 selected studies can be grouped into four main clusters related to the development of critical education. First, several studies focus on innovative, student-centered teaching methods that enhance critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, such as constructivist approaches, STEM, blended learning, and biophilic design. These studies show that active and context-based pedagogies can significantly improve students' engagement, autonomy, and academic achievement, which are key components of critical education. Second, several studies explicitly apply critical theories, including Critical Race Theory, DisCrit, LatCrit, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory, to uncover how racism, classism, and other forms of oppression operate in education. These works demonstrate that critical theory provides powerful tools for analyzing structural inequality and designing more socially just curricula and learning environments.

Third, some studies emphasize teachers' and faculty development, such as peer observation, action research, and collaborative teaching partnerships. These articles underscore that the transformation toward critical education requires not only new methods but also continuous professional support so educators can develop critical-thinking pedagogies and inclusive practices. Finally, a smaller group of conceptual studies explores hope, ethical imagination, and democratic education as foundational elements of critical pedagogy. These works reinforce the idea that critical education should not stop at diagnosing injustice. However, they must also cultivate hope and agency so that students can see themselves as subjects capable of contributing to social change. Overall, the synthesis in Table 1 indicates that the development of critical education in the literature involves not only the adoption of innovative teaching techniques but also the integration of DisCrit, LatCrit, intersectionality, and hope into pedagogical practice, teacher development, and curriculum design. This mapping provides the

empirical and theoretical basis for the present study to formulate a critical education model that addresses social injustice through both structural analysis and classroom-level transformation.

#### ***Application of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) in Education***

Of the 23 studies included in this SLR, 12 articles explicitly applied DisCrit or closely related critical race approaches to disability in educational settings (James-Galloway & Turner, 2022; Migliarini & Stinson, 2021; Shillingford et al., 2022). These studies consistently show that DisCrit-informed pedagogies help identify and challenge intersecting forms of racism and ableism that shape classroom practices and institutional policies. For example, (Migliarini & Stinson, 2021) demonstrate how reciprocity and translanguaging practices create more inclusive English language classrooms for students labeled with disabilities and racialized as minorities. Across these studies, students who participate in DisCrit-oriented learning environments report increased self-esteem, stronger recognition of their own experiences of injustice, and greater participation in classroom dialogue. This evidence indicates that DisCrit not only functions as an analytical framework, but also as a practical basis for transforming pedagogy and classroom culture in ways that support the goals of critical education in this study (Busey & Silva, 50 C.E.).

The application of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) in education has proven to be an effective approach to addressing the social injustices experienced by students with disabilities and racial minorities (J.Bedford & Shaffer, 2023). This theory helps identify and address discrimination based on race and disability, and raises awareness of social injustice in education. DisCrit challenges dominant norms that often ignore the diversity of student identities, thereby enabling more inclusive teaching. Students involved in classes with DisCrit principles show an increase in self-esteem and understanding of how the education system often ignores their needs (Anya, 2021). When applied, DisCrit can foster learning practices such as reciprocity and translanguaging, creating a more open and inclusive space for students from diverse backgrounds. This can strengthen student participation in learning and reduce the feelings of marginalization often experienced by students with disabilities and from minority races.

#### ***Application of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) in Education***

Many of the reviewed articles employed LatCrit or CRT-based analyses that specifically foreground Latino students' experiences, often combined with intersectionality and anti-oppressive practice (Chow et al., 2021; Franco, 2021; Robertson, 2020) (Franco, 2021). That conventional "cultural competence" models in social work education fail to address structural racism and propose a LatCrit–intersectionality–AOP framework that centers students' testimonios as critical knowledge (Taylor, 2023). These studies reveal how immigration status, language, socioeconomic position, and racialization intersect to shape Latino students' opportunities and constraints within schooling. Curricular designs informed by LatCrit encourage students to reflect critically on policy, everyday discrimination, and institutional narratives, thereby increasing their active participation in discussions of social justice (Chávez-Moreno, 2022). Thus, the LatCrit literature in this review provides the empirical basis for positioning students' lived experiences and counter-stories as core components of the critical education model developed in this research.

The application of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) in education focuses on the experiences of students from Latino backgrounds, who often face marginalization in the education system. LatCrit, which integrates intersectionality, delves deeper into the social experiences of Latino students, taking into account factors such as immigration, socioeconomic status, and their cultural identity (Chávez-Moreno, 2021). Curricula integrated with LatCrit encourage more holistic, student-experience-sensitive learning and foster deep reflection on the structures of injustice that affect them individually. In addition, LatCrit enables better teaching about cultural diversity that goes beyond the surface and encompasses more complex social experiences based on interrelated social identities. Research also found that the application of LatCrit in the curriculum increased students' active participation in

discussions about social justice, giving them the tools to challenge the injustices they face in education and daily life (Chávez-moreno, 2024).

### ***Integration of Intersectionality Theory in Education***

Fourteen studies in the sample explicitly integrated intersectionality into their curriculum, pedagogy, or theoretical analysis (Cowley, 2022; Franco, 2021; Sarid & Levanon, 2020). These works demonstrate that students' experiences cannot be understood through a single category, such as race or gender, but emerge from the interaction of race, class, gender, disability, and other axes of identity. Intersectional instruction in these studies yielded three recurring outcomes: students became more critical of structures of oppression, more empathetic toward peers from marginalized groups, and more able to reflect on their own positionality. For example, (Cowley, 2022) combined Critical Race Theory and Black Marxism to highlight how race and class mutually reinforce exclusion in higher education, while (Sarid & Levanon, 2020) argued that communities of practice need to be rethought through critical reflection and ethical imagination. These findings support the inclusion of intersectionality within the critical education frameworks of these studies as a key lens for analyzing and transforming unequal social relations in education.

The integration of intersectionality theory in education allows students to understand their life experiences, which are influenced by various social identity factors, such as race, social class, gender, and disability (Gutlerrezz, 2022). This provides a deeper understanding of social injustice and how these factors are interrelated. By using intersectionality theory, social education enriches the discourse of education, allowing students to reflect on their experiences that are not only influenced by one identity, but by the interaction between various social factors (Ishimaru et al., 2022). Intersectional education introduces students to broader concepts of social injustice and helps them think critically about how they can contribute to more just and inclusive social change. Studies also find that intersectionality-based teaching makes students more sensitive to issues affecting minority groups and strengthens their sense of empathy, as well as increasing their desire to take action against social injustice (Cadenas & Kiehne, 2021).

### ***The Role of Expectancy in Critical Education***

Ten of the reviewed articles discuss hope, motivation, or psychological capital as central to critical or transformative education (Almulla, 2023; Huang, 2022; Ichikawa, 2020). (Ichikawa, 2020) interprets Giroux's critical pedagogy as grounded in "militant hope", which links critical awareness to the possibility of collective social transformation. Empirical studies on digital readiness, entrepreneurial psychological capital, and constructivist learning (Almulla, 2023; Huang, 2022) show that when students believe change is possible and see themselves as capable agents, their engagement, persistence, and critical thinking increase. Across these studies, hope functions not as naïve optimism but as a pedagogical resource that sustains students' involvement in long-term struggles against injustice. Building on this evidence, the present study positions hope as a core dimension of critical education, connecting theoretical critique with students' motivation to act for social change.

Expectations play an important role in critical education by encouraging students to think about their future and a better world. Expectancy theory serves as a motivator for students to feel that social change is possible and that they can contribute to achieving it (Annamma et al., 2023). Critical education that emphasizes hope helps students see themselves as agents of change with the potential to influence society. This hope is not only theoretical, but also connected to concrete actions in the fight for social justice (Agosto, 2018). Research shows that students involved in hope-based critical education are more motivated to engage in social action that opposes injustice and fights for their rights and those of other marginalized people. This hope also helps students develop a deeper understanding of their social rights and encourages them to act collectively to advance social change.

### ***The Influence of Critical Education on Social Awareness and Student Empowerment***

Twelve studies in the corpus explicitly report outcomes related to social awareness, agency, or empowerment in contexts where critical or innovative pedagogies were implemented (Hegazy et al., 2021; Joudeh et al., 2024; Laletas et al., 2022). These articles show that critical pedagogy, participatory action research, co-teaching partnerships, and culture-based approaches (such as Ethno-SETSaR) help students recognize various forms of injustice, racial inequality, the exclusion of people with disabilities, and the marginalization of particular communities, and encourage them to respond collectively. For example, (Matiti, 2024) documents how participatory action research in mathematics education empowers students to negotiate the transition between school levels and to challenge deficit views of their abilities. Similarly, (Laletas et al., 2022) Find that co-teaching partnerships “break down the walls of the ivory tower” by connecting inclusive education theory with classroom practice and strengthening students’ sense of belonging. Taken together, this body of work supports the conclusion that critical education can significantly enhance students’ social awareness and empower them to participate in movements for a more just society, which is the central claim of this SLR.

Critical education has a significant impact on students' social awareness and empowerment. By using critical theory, this education increases students' awareness of social injustice in their lives, both inside and outside of school (Gutiérrez & Lechuga-Peña, 2022). This encourages students to evaluate and question existing social structures. Students exposed to critical education are more likely to identify social injustices in various forms, including racial inequality, discrimination against people with disabilities, and marginalization of certain groups. Critical education also empowers students by giving them the tools to voice the inequalities they face and work with others in movements to create a more just world. The positive influence of this education is evident in increased student participation in social activities focused on social change, as well as in their readiness to play an active role in improving social conditions.

### **Discussion**

#### ***DisCrit dan LatCrit***

Of the 23 studies in this SLR, 12 explicitly employ DisCrit or closely related CRT approaches to disability, and 8 use LatCrit or Latino-focused CRT analyses in educational contexts (James-Galloway & Turner, 2022; Migliarini & Stinson, 2021; Shillingford et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with Migliarini and Stinson’s argument that schooling often normalizes “white” and “non-disabled” norms and positions racialized students with disabilities as deviant. However, the present review extends their work by showing that this pattern appears across multiple subjects, levels, and countries, not only in TESOL. At the same time, several articles report that DisCrit-informed practices such as reciprocity and translanguaging are unevenly implemented and sometimes constrained by standardized testing regimes, indicating that the potential of DisCrit as a transformative pedagogy remains limited by broader policy structures.

For LatCrit, our findings align with Franco’s (2020) critique of superficial “cultural competence”: the studies reviewed show that curricula that only add cultural examples without addressing immigration status, language hierarchies, or socioeconomic marginalization fail to change power relations for Latino students. However, a few studies also suggest that LatCrit-based activities can become tokenistic when institutional support is weak, which complicates the optimistic claims in some earlier work and highlights the need to analyze how race, language, and power are negotiated in specific institutional contexts (Collins, n.d.; Hsiao, 2024). Interpreted through the lenses of DisCrit and LatCrit, the overall pattern of the 23 articles suggests that structural discrimination is reproduced both through classroom practices and through broader policies, so that critical theories must be accompanied by changes in assessment, accountability, and resource allocation to achieve deeper curriculum transformation (Veronico N. Tarrayo, 2025).

### ***Hope in Critical Education***

Ten studies in the sample explicitly address hope, motivation, or psychological capital as part of critical or transformative education (Almulla, 2023; Huang, 2022; Ichikawa, 2020). In line with Giroux's notion of "militant optimism" and Freire's "Pedagogy of Hope", these studies show that students who see social change as possible tend to participate more actively in critical dialogue and collaborative projects. However, several articles also warn that exposing students to harsh realities of oppression without adequate support can lead to feelings of helplessness or political fatigue, which partially contrasts with more celebratory accounts of critical pedagogy that focus only on empowerment.

This tension indicates that hope should be understood not as a constant emotional state, but as a pedagogical and political project that must be deliberately cultivated through concrete opportunities for agency, small wins, and collective action (Sebti, 2024). The present SLR therefore suggests that curriculum designs that integrate critical analysis with realistic pathways for action are more likely to sustain students' psychological resilience than those that rely solely on denouncing injustice. This tension indicates that hope should be understood not as a constant emotional state, but as a pedagogical and political project that must be deliberately cultivated through concrete opportunities for agency, small wins, and collective action (Reynoso et al., 2023). The present SLR therefore suggests that curriculum designs which integrate critical analysis with realistic pathways for action are more likely to sustain students' psychological resilience than those that rely solely on denunciation of injustice (Annamma, 2020).

### ***Intersectionality and Student Reflection***

Fourteen studies explicitly apply intersectionality to analyze students' experiences or to structure teaching activities (Cowley, 2022; Franco, 2021; Sarid & Levanon, 2020). This finding supports, but also nuances, earlier claims that intersectionality automatically deepens students' understanding: while many students become more critical of structures of oppression and more empathetic toward peers, some struggle to connect abstract categories (race, class, gender, disability) with their own lives when teaching remains too theoretical (Kozleski et al., 2020). Compared with single-axis approaches in older diversity education literature, the intersectional studies in this review better capture how different forms of oppression intersect, yet they also reveal that teachers need strong theoretical and pedagogical preparation to avoid reducing intersectionality to a checklist of identities (Repi et al., 2021).

Interpreted through an intersectionality lens, the SLR indicates that the most effective practices are those that link structural analysis (laws, policies, institutional histories) with situated narratives (testimonios, case studies, community projects), so that students can see how overlapping systems of power operate in concrete contexts. This supports the argument that intersectionality should function not only as a descriptive theory of identity but as a critical pedagogical tool for examining and transforming unequal social relations in schools and communities.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that applying critical theories, such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and the concept of intersectionality in education, can play an important role in overcoming social injustice. The main findings show that DisCrit and LatCrit are not only analytical theories, but can also be applied in more inclusive and equitable pedagogical practices, opening up space for students from racial and disability backgrounds to develop to their full potential. DisCrit emphasizes that education must accommodate racial and disability diversity in a more equitable and equal manner. At the same time, LatCrit focuses on the socio-economic experiences of Latino students and teaches them to identify social injustice around them. Meanwhile, integrating intersectionality into the educational curriculum allows students to reflect on how their social identities interact and shape their life experiences, thereby providing a deeper understanding of social injustice.

Furthermore, hope in critical education, as articulated by Giroux and Freire, has proven crucial for changing students' social consciousness and empowering them to act in the face of injustice. Education that integrates hope not only encourages students to understand existing injustices but also gives them a sense of agency to engage in social change. Thus, critical education not only helps students recognize social problems but also equips them with the tools to effect change. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the understanding of how education can be a more inclusive and transformative tool for social empowerment by integrating critical theories into the curriculum and educational practices.

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