Literacy as a Social Practice: Exploring Teacher Representations

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Abstract

This study explores how literacy is conceptualized by teachers in two primary classrooms, drawing upon James Paul Gee's theoretical framework on literacy as a social practice. The research is guided by two questions: How do teachers conceptualize literacy within the context of their classrooms? How do contextual characteristics position students' identities as literacy learners/users? Through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, three predominant themes were developed: a narrow focus of literacy, deficit-oriented framing of student abilities, and teacher-centered pedagogy. The findings reveal that teachers often emphasize foundational writing skills and view literacy through a lens of deficiency, which shapes students' identities as passive learners. This research underscores the need for inclusive and equitable literacy education that acknowledges diverse backgrounds and experiences, advocating for pedagogical shifts that empower students as active participants in their literacy development.

Keywords: Literacy, Social Practice, James Paul Gee, primary education, pedagogic practices, qualitative research

Introduction

In recent decades, research on literacy has shift from views of reading and writing as isolated technical skills to recognizing literacy as a complex social practice. This perspective, grounded in sociocultural theories, emphasizes that literacy is shaped by cultural, institutional, and power dynamics. Literacy practices are now understood as deeply embedded in social contexts, where discourses of power and identity shape how individuals engage with reading and writing (Gee, 1989, 2011; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Poulson et al., 2001).

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While literacy is increasingly understood as a social practice shaped by cultural, institutional, and power dynamics, there remains a gap in understanding how teachers' conceptualizations of literacy are related to students' identities as literacy learners and users. This gap is especially significant for students from marginalized backgrounds, where mismatches between home-based and school-based literacy practices can reinforce systemic inequities. To address this, the study in this article makes an initial step by describing teachers' representations and understandings of literacy as a social practice.

This paper explores how literacy is constructed by teachers in two primary classrooms, applying James Paul Gee's framework of literacy as a social and cultural practice. Gee's concept of "Discourses" (Gee, 1989, 2012) serves as a lens to analyze how teachers describe the literacy context in their classrooms, thereby shaping student identities as learners. Through thematic analysis of interviews, this study describes teachers' literacy practices to enhance our understanding of the socially accepted ways of using language in school contexts represented by the participants in the study. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about the need for more equitable and inclusive literacy education.

1. Literacy as a Social Practice

The understanding of literacy has shifted from viewing it as a purely cognitive skill to recognizing it as a social practice, deeply influenced by cultural and institutional contexts. Barton and Hamilton (1998) emphasize that literacy is not just about the mechanics of reading and writing; it also encompasses the social relationships, values, and ideologies that inform how literacy is practiced and understood. This perspective invites educators and researchers to look beyond the technical aspects of literacy and consider the broader social factors that shape how individuals engage with consuming and producing texts (Gee, 2015) and construct meaning.

From this viewpoint, literacy is relational, embedded in the everyday social practices of individuals and communities. Barton and Hamilton (1998) argue that literacy practices are context-dependent, varying across different cultural, economic, and institutional environments. For example, the literacy practices of students at home may differ significantly from those expected in formal educational settings. This disconnect can result in a mismatch between students' home-based literacies and the literacies valued in schools, often privileging dominant cultural narratives and marginalizing students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Cairney & Ruge, 1998).

One of the central concerns of this approach is the role of power in shaping what counts as legitimate literacy practices. Gee (1989) builds on this by introducing the concept of "Discourses," which refers to socially accepted ways of using language, thinking, and acting that reflect specific social and cultural identities. He distinguishes between "primary Discourses," which individuals acquire through early socialization in their homes and communities, and "secondary Discourses," which are learned in

institutions like schools. This distinction highlights the potential for conflict when students' primary Discourses do not align with the secondary Discourses they encounter in educational contexts. These tensions can impact students' identity formation and their ability to navigate different literacy practices effectively.

Gee's framework also introduces the concept of "literacy events" and "literacy practices," which help to illustrate how literacy is enacted in specific contexts. A "literacy event" refers to any occasion where written language is integral to the interaction, while "literacy practices" are the broader social and cultural norms that shape how individuals engage in these events (Gee, 1987). This distinction allows for a more nuanced analysis of how literacy is situated within everyday life and how power relations within a given context can influence access to literacy. For instance, in classroom settings, teachers' definitions of literacy and the pedagogical approaches they use can either reproduce or challenge existing power dynamics, shaping who gets to participate in literacy practices and how.

Digital literacy adds another layer of complexity to the discussion. As Kumpulainen and Gillen (2017) point out, children's engagement with digital literacy at home is often overlooked in traditional literacy instruction. Digital literacies, which involve navigating multimedia and interactive platforms, are an integral part of many students' everyday lives, yet they are rarely incorporated into classroom instruction in meaningful ways. This oversight contributes to the ongoing disconnect between home and school literacies, particularly for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, where digital engagement may be mediated differently.

The role of families in shaping children's literacy practices is also crucial. Research shows that parents mediate their children's digital literacy experiences in various ways, such as through "co-use" (participating in activities together), "active mediation" (providing guidance), or "restrictive mediation" (setting limits) (Kumpulainen & Gillen, 2017, Kumpulainen et al., 2020). These strategies are influenced by the parents' own educational backgrounds and digital proficiency, which can further widen the gap between home and school literacy practices. Understanding the interplay between these home-based practices and school expectations is vital for creating inclusive literacy environments that bridge these divides.

By viewing literacy as a social practice, educators are encouraged to consider how their instructional methods might either support or marginalize certain students. Pedagogical decisions are not neutral; they reflect broader societal ideologies and can either perpetuate or disrupt systemic inequities (Hattan & Lupo, 2020). For students from diverse backgrounds, recognizing and incorporating their home-based literacy practices into the classroom can create more inclusive learning environments (Kumpulainen & Gillen, 2017). When literacy instruction fails to account for these diverse practices, it risks alienating students whose experiences and identities do not align with the dominant literacy norms (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Rogers, 2002, Rogers & Schaenen, 2014)).

While literacy is defined as a competence, it can still be framed as something to be taught or learned. Competences are indeed developed through structured processes, but this development inherently involves elements of learning, teaching, and content. The use of literacy as a competence does not exclude these terms or their relevance within pedagogical discourse. As Gee (1989, 2010) argues, literacy is not a neutral or standalone skill but is deeply embedded in social, cultural, and disciplinary practices. It involves participating in specific "Discourses," which are integrated ways of saying, doing, being, valuing, and believing.

According to the romanian national curriculum, competences are defined as structured ensembles of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through learning, which allow for solving specific problems within a field or general problems in various particular contexts. This aligns with the sociocultural perspective that literacy practices are not decontextualized skills but are situated in specific social and cultural contexts where texts, language, and actions are intertwined (Draper et al., 2005; Gee, 1987). Draper et al. (2005) further emphasize that separating literacy from content is detrimental, as literacy acts and content knowledge are interdependent; meaningful literacy activities require an understanding of the concepts they aim to communicate. This reinforces the idea that literacy instruction must be contextualized within the content area.

From the teacher's perspective, as long as the significance of knowledge is not overemphasized (e.g., equating competences solely with knowledge), the formation of competences cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of knowledge. Teaching literacy involves apprenticing students into discipline-specific practices, where they learn to navigate the norms, conventions, and values of particular fields, as Gee (2010) highlights through his concept of "apprenticeship in social practices." Similarly, while content is not the sole aim of the teaching-learning process, it remains a crucial element, as literacy practices cannot exist independently of the content that gives them meaning. As Draper et al. (2005) assert, "there is no such thing as a general ability to read and write; there is only the ability to read and write something" (p. 14).

We acknowledge the importance of emphasizing literacy as a competence and will revise specific phrasing to align with this perspective, ensuring clarity and consistency with contemporary educational discourse. At the same time, we aim to maintain a pedagogical approach that recognizes the interdependence of teaching, learning, and content, as these elements play a foundational role in developing literacy as a dynamic and multidimensional competence. As Gee (1989) and Draper et al. (2005) argue, literacy involves not only technical skills but also the ability to engage with and contribute to the social practices and Discourses of a community, making the integration of teaching, content, and social context indispensable.

This study, grounded in Gee's (1989) theoretical insights regarding discourse and literacy practices, seeks to examine how teachers in two primary classrooms talk about literacy as a social practice, so that, in Gee's terms (2015) we have a glimpse on the

favoured ways of using texts and language. While literacy is increasingly understood as a social practice shaped by cultural, institutional, and power dynamics, there remains a gap in understanding how teachers' conceptualizations of literacy impact students' identities as literacy learners. This gap is especially significant for students from marginalized backgrounds, where mismatches between home-based and school-based literacy practices can reinforce systemic inequities. By analyzing how educators mediate literacy through classroom discourse, this research aims to bring more understanding on how students' identities as literacy learners are shaped by these practices. The study further explores the implications of these findings for developing more inclusive and equitable literacy education, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse literacy practices in schools. To address this, the study examines how teachers in two primary classrooms conceptualize literacy within their specific contexts and how these contextual characteristics influence students' identities as literacy learners.The research questions that guided my analysis are:

- How do teachers conceptualize literacy within the context of their classrooms?
- How do contextual characteristics position students' identities as literacy learners?

2. Metodology

2.1. Research Design

For the study presented here I used a qualitative research design, that is being part of a broader ethnographic research conducted for my doctoral dissertation, between 2018-2019. Data for this article were collected based on longitudinal semi-structured and non-structured interviews with two primary school teachers over two academic years. The data thus obtained were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in light of a constructivist approach. The design allowed me to document and understand litearcy practices, and the representations of students as learners and users of literacy practices. The audio recordings were made using a mobile phone, and all identifying details regarding the schools and their locations will remain confidential, with data being anonymized in the reporting of the research results.

2.2.Generation of the data

Throughout the 2017/2018 school year, semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with teachers from the classes under study. An interview guide was developed, with each interview typically starting from 1-3 prepared questions and evolving based on observed classroom elements. A total of 31 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 10 and 45 minutes. Notably, on days when classroom observations were made, multiple interview sessions were held depending on the teachers' availability. The interviews were generally carried out during free periods, when students were engaged in other subjects with different teachers, such as religion, physical

education, or modern languages. Additionally, discussions sometimes took place during breaks or after the school day. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted with only two teachers participating in the study, and these sessions were carried out longitudinally. The semi-structured longitudinal format allowed for detailed insights related to the studied contexts—specifically the two classes of students—and fostered the development of the research relationship with the participants. Throughout the interview process, repeated engagement with specific themes allowed for greater saturation of the data obtained. On several occasions, aspects that could not be addressed in one session were revisited in subsequent interviews. Additionally, these interactions enabled clarification of certain characteristics of the activities observed in class, allowing for a more in-depth analysis. For instance, in my field notes on October 12, 2018, I recorded: "08:20: The children are not having physical education today; they had a math class. Why math? In the brief conversation with Gabriela (not her real name), she mentioned they are counting up to 100 and finding it difficult. She noted that next week, likely on Thursday, they will have a test and are preparing for it." The themes explored in the interviews included the conduct of activities, text engagement, educational goals, litearcy, the teachers' educational backgrounds, and the challenges faced by students when learning literacy and numeracy. The participants' name have been changed to Gabriela(Bucharest school) and Cristina (Ilfov school).

Data were collected from two conveniently selected general schools: one situated in Bucharest and the other in an urbanized rural area of Ilfov County, near Bucharest. In each school, the principal recommended a primary education teacher to participate in the study. The demographic and professional characteristics of the teachers were not considered, as the study's aim was not to examine correlations between practices and contextual or professional variables. Instead, it sought to describe and conceptualize a set of educational practices to establish a useful inventory for future correlational research.

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, I employed a qualitative approach informed by the concepts of James Paul Gee (2011, 2015) to analyze teachers' discourse surrounding literacy practices and students as literacy learners. My analysis was grounded in Gee's framework of discourse analysis and literacy studies, positioning it as a descriptive discourse analysis that delves into themes related to literacy practices. I analyzed discourse as language in use (Gee, 2015; Schiffrin et al., 2008) in relation to literacy.

Gee utilizes a theory of discourse constituted by five interrelated linguistic systems that make a text more meaningful to its users. From the five systems—prosody, cohesion, overall discourse organization, contextualization signals, and thematic organization—I focused solely on thematic organization to understand how teachers discuss literacy. Contextualization signals provided insight into literacy contexts by revealing the cues teachers use to frame their discussions.

In my analysis, I included references to activities from both language and mathematics classes to emphasize the comprehensive nature of literacy as it pertains to both language and numerical understanding, as both can be seen as texts. As Gee (2015) mentions, it is crucial not to reduce reading solely to decoding but to also focus on reading to learn. He highlights that while children may pass early reading tests, they might struggle to learn school content, such as math and science, when it becomes more complex around fourth grade. This connection underscores that literacy extends beyond basic reading and writing skills; it includes the ability to understand and apply concepts in various contexts, including mathematics.

This methodology enabled me to explore how teachers represent contexts and students as literacy learners and users. To derive insights into the contextual characteristics of literacy and students, I conducted a thematic analysis following Saldana's (2009) methodology, which involved iterative stages of coding and thematizing the data. After familiarizing myself with the data, I initiated the coding process using MAXQDA software and adopted an inductive approach to capture the nuanced aspects of the discourse. Following the initial coding phase, I expanded my categories to incorporate additional details, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the data. In the final phase of analysis, I organized the codes into overarching themes, taking into account the study's conceptual framework while remaining open to interpretations that extended beyond it.

3. Results and discussions

This section presents the analysis and organization of the data into three interconnected themes prevalent in teachers' literacy discourses. The first theme, Narrow Focus on Mechanical Skills, highlights a limited conception of literacy that prioritizes discrete competencies over holistic understanding. The second theme, Teacher-Centered Pedagogy, explores the implications of a pedagogical approach dominated by teacher directives, positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge. The third theme, Deficit-Oriented Framing of Student Abilities, delves into how educators' discourses frequently emphasize students' literacy deficits, perpetuating negative self-perceptions and limiting their engagement with literacy. By framing students through a lens of deficiency, educators risk marginalizing the rich cultural resources that students bring from their home environments. Collectively, these themes describe diverse challenges in the literacy context constructed by teachers. They reveal a prevailing emphasis on mechanical skills, teacher-centered pedagogy, and deficit-oriented thinking, which can marginalize students' diverse experiences and identities.

Theme 1: Narrow Focus of Literacy

In discussing literacy, both teachers, Gabriela and Cristina, frequently emphasize the development of foundational writing skills, such as letter formation, transcription, and other mechanical aspects of literacy. This is also evident in their repeated references to students' difficulties in distinguishing sounds, syllables, and words, as well as their frustrations with handwriting and transcription abilities. The discourse reflects a strong focus on activities like "dictation" and "transcription," prioritizing the mastery of discrete, measurable competencies over more meaningful, contextualized literacy practices.

For instance, Gabriela expresses her goals for the students: "We will learn to read. Clearly. This year, we will learn to write words with printed letters. And if the class allows, I dream of teaching them cursive letters by the end of the year, even though it's not in the curriculum. I know I exceed expectations, but only if the class permits." This aspiration illustrates her commitment to developing literacy skills, yet it also reinforces a narrow understanding of literacy.

By privileging these limited conceptions of literacy, teachers construct a skills-based understanding of what it means to be literate. For example, Cristina states, "This year we will focus a lot on calligraphic writing," which overlooks the multifaceted, socially situated nature of literacy as described by Barton and Hamilton (1998).

This focus suggests that students are often seen as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active constructors of their understanding. By concentrating primarily on mechanical skills, the teachers' language indicates a narrow conceptualization of literacy that emphasizes technical abilities over holistic literacy development. Concerns about whether students can "make a line in the space" for proper letter formation reflect this limited perspective, as do observations regarding students' ability to write numbers correctly.

Focusing on technical proficiency may restrict students' opportunities for meaningful and empowering literacy experiences that transcend mere mastery of discrete skills. Such a critique aligns with the call for inclusive pedagogical practices that honor students' diverse identities and experiences, as highlighted by Kumpulainen and Gillen (2017).

This framing perpetuates a culture where literacy is viewed as a series of mechanical tasks rather than a dynamic, socially situated practice that allows for individual expression and critical engagement. Consequently, the narrow focus on mechanical skills not only constrains the educational experience but also shapes students' identities in ways that may hinder their development as confident, capable literacy learners.

Gabriela further elaborates on the importance of organization: "First of all, we need to work on their organization. We must know which books to take out and how to get all our materials, because they tend to leave things in their desks like last year. They were so surprised that we have to take them! Yes, because older students come and don't have space for their things." She continues, "I don't have big objectives... the main goal is to learn to write correctly. That's what we will focus on heavily. There will be a routine:

dictation. Every day, they will have a short dictation. It will be a huge effort for me, as I will need to check their work."

In summary, the emphasis on mechanical skills in literacy instruction shapes the educational environment in ways that may undermine students' ability to engage with literacy as a rich, multifaceted practice.

Theme 2: Deficit-Oriented Framing of Student Abilities

When discussing literacy and numeracy activities in the classroom, both teachers' discourses predominantly highlight students' deficits and struggles, focusing on their perceived "lack" of preparedness, basic skills, and organizational habits. For instance, teachers express concerns about whether students can "make a line in the space" for proper letter formation and note that "almost all of Ida's numbers are written in the mirror," indicating widespread issues with foundational literacy skills. This deficit-oriented perspective risks constructing students as inherently lacking the necessary competencies for literacy development, aligning with the views of Gee (1989), who posits that such thinking limits students' engagement and identity formation.

An example of this can be seen in Crina's situation, mentioned by Gabriela: "Crina wrote her name with the letters reversed. Writing in mirror form." This highlights the challenges faced by students that teachers often discuss in a negative light.

Moreover, this framing extends to perceptions of family background, where the lack of familial support is viewed as a significant barrier to students' literacy development. Both teachers, especially those from the rural context, lament insufficient support at home, suggesting that students are disadvantaged by unsupportive families. Also, Gabriela reflects this sentiment when she remarks that some students "didn't do anything all summer," which shows a dismissive attitude toward parents and a failure to recognize the valuable resources families can contribute to literacy learning. This echoes concerns raised by Kumpulainen and Gillen (2017) about the disconnect between home and school literacy practices, reinforcing negative stereotypes about family backgrounds and perpetuating the notion that students' struggles stem solely from their home environments.

Additionally, Ida's enthusiasm for school contrasts with the lack of support at home. As Cristina explains: "Ida loves coming to school, but nobody does anything with her at home; she has two cousins who are scattered." This disconnect is compounded by my memory of a previous class visit and Cristina's statement about Ida's mother: "She is only interested when there's a new magazine to buy. She stays with her grandmother." This reflects a lack of engagement with Ida's learning process at home, further emphasizing how the educational context can overlook the potential contributions from families.

The teachers' comments underscore the issues: "Two rules we have: the first word must start with a capital letter, and there must be a period at the end or a question mark. Now, I tell you, and in the second, you write with a lowercase 'c'?" This frustration

towards Andrei's writing habits reflects broader concerns regarding the students' learning environments and their readiness for literacy tasks.

This deficit-oriented framing can be exacerbated by a lack of culturally responsive approaches in the classroom. While teachers acknowledge varying abilities and learning challenges, they often fail to integrate these considerations into their pedagogical practices. This disconnect can lead to a one-size-fits-all approach that neglects the unique cultural backgrounds and home languages of the students, further alienating them from the learning process (Hattan & Lupo, 2020).

When teachers view students through a lens of deficiency, they overlook the diverse strengths and literacy practices these students bring from their homes, further marginalizing those whose experiences and identities do not conform to dominant literacy norms. This aligns with Cairney and Ruge's (1998) critique of deficit thinking, which suggests such perspectives can lead to students being perceived as "weaker" compared to their peers. Challenging deficit-oriented thinking is essential for shifting instructional strategies to honor students' existing literacy practices and cultural identities. Such reframing supports literacy development while fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed.

Theme 3: Teacher-Centered Pedagogy

The theme of teacher-centered pedagogy encapsulates several conceptual aspects that unite around the notion of a classroom environment dominated by teacher directives and control. Central to this theme is the reliance on direct instruction, where students are expected to passively reproduce text from the board or textbooks, reflecting a traditional view of literacy as a set of skills to be memorized rather than actively constructed. This approach is evident in the teachers' frequent references to activities like "dictation" and "transcription," which emphasize rote learning and mastery of discrete competencies over more meaningful, contextualized literacy practices.

Additionally, the marginalization of student voices and interests is apparent, as teachers focus primarily on their own observations and assessments while neglecting to actively engage students in the learning process. This lack of attention to individual goals and aspirations implies a disregard for students' agency and individuality. For example, Gabriela reflects on the challenges of maintaining student focus: "They get tired; you see they can't concentrate, so sometimes we incorporate a song or a poem to change the task and give them a break." This shows an awareness of student needs but also highlights the limitation of relying on such occasional diversions rather than integrating student interests into the curriculum.

The researcher (me) finds the idea of using coloring stamps interesting: "I found this idea about the stamp you color very engaging." Gabriela explains how these rewards are part of her strategy: "These are the incentives. I tell the parents how much their children can do for a stamp or a sticker." This points to a transactional view of engagement, where

students may feel that their efforts are only valued in terms of extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, the excessive reliance on structure and control within the classroom illustrates the implications of teacher-centered pedagogy. Teachers emphasize creating a highly structured, routine-based environment to instill a sense of security among students, often prioritizing calligraphic writing and explicit behavior expectations. Gabriela notes, "They have to work quickly and stay on the same rhythm; it's crucial for us to stay on track. If you let them work at their own pace, you won't cover everything." This approach stifles students' natural curiosity and limits opportunities for independent, exploratory learning.

Lastly, the normalization of behavioral compliance is evident through the teachers' strong emphasis on developing organizational habits and behavioral regulation. The insistence on conformity undermines students' intrinsic motivation and self-regulation skills, promoting a culture where obedience is valued over critical thinking and independent inquiry. Cristina states, "I number them to keep track of those who are still lagging behind; it pushes them to keep up, and I can't wait until the end of the lesson to check every exercise."

In a teacher-centered pedagogical context, the student is often constructed as a passive recipient of knowledge, expected to conform to predetermined norms and expectations. This approach fosters a perception of students as homogeneous learners, reducing their individuality and agency. The emphasis on mechanical skills and rigid routines may lead to the development of a fixed identity, where students are viewed primarily through the lens of their deficiencies and compliance. Consequently, students might struggle to see themselves as active participants in their literacy learning, potentially undermining their motivation and engagement (Gee, 1989; Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

This type of learning environment can reinforce a narrow conception of literacy, failing to recognize the diverse backgrounds and experiences that each student brings. By overlooking students' personal interests and cultural contexts, educators risk alienating them from the learning process, inhibiting their capacity to develop critical literacy skills essential for navigating the complexities of their social worlds.

In summary, teacher-centered pedagogy, as represented in the discourse of these educators, reflects a limited view of literacy education that prioritizes mechanical skills and conformity over student agency and active engagement. This approach, while perhaps well-intentioned, risks alienating students and constraining their potential for meaningful participation in the classroom. To foster a more inclusive literacy environment, educators must critically examine their pedagogical practices and consider how to incorporate students' diverse backgrounds and interests into the learning process.

4. Conclusions

This study identifies three main themes that illuminate how teachers' discourses shape literacy practices and influence students' identities as learners. First, the narrow focus of literacy highlights an overemphasis on foundational writing abilities, which limits literacy to technical competencies. Second, teacher-centered pedagogy reflects a classroom environment dominated by teacher directives, often marginalizing student voices and interests. Lastly, the deficit-oriented framing of student abilities reveals a tendency to view students through a lens of deficiency. The aim of this study was to investigate how teachers in two primary classrooms conceptualize and articulate literacy as a social practice, using Gee's theoretical framework on discourse and literacy practices. By examining classroom discourse, the research sought to understand the favored ways educators use texts and language and how these practices shape students' identities as literacy learners. Furthermore, the study explored the implications for creating more inclusive and equitable literacy education that values diverse literacy practices within educational contexts.

The analysis shows that teachers predominantly conceptualize literacy as a set of foundational skills, heavily focusing on mechanical aspects such as handwriting and transcription. This narrow view emphasizes discrete, measurable competencies, limiting the recognition of literacy as a multifaceted practice encompassing social and cultural dimensions. Consequently, students are often seen as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in constructing their understanding of literacy. Contextual characteristics such as the emphasis on mechanical skills and teacher-centered pedagogy significantly shape students' identities as literacy learners. Students may internalize negative self-perceptions and view themselves as inadequate. Furthermore, the framing of students through a deficit lens, compounded by perceptions of family backgrounds, influences how they navigate literacy practices.

According to the romanian national curriculum(Palade et al., 2020), competences are ensembles of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable problem-solving in specific and diverse contexts, reflecting a dynamic, situated understanding of literacy. However, teachers' discourse emphasize technical skills like handwriting and transcription at the expense of broader, contextualized literacy practices. This narrow focus risks reducing literacy to decontextualized acts, which, as Draper et al. (2005) highlight, can undermine the integration of content knowledge and meaningful literacy activities essential for fostering competence.

The deficit-oriented framing of students further complicates the development of literacy competence. By viewing students primarily through a lens of deficiencies, educators overlook the cultural and social resources students bring to their learning environments. This perspective contrasts with Gee's (1989) notion of literacy as an apprenticeship into social practices, which requires recognizing and building upon students' unique backgrounds. Similarly, the teacher-centered pedagogy limits opportunities for students to actively engage in constructing their literacy practices.

Instead of fostering a dynamic interplay between teaching, learning, and content, this approach positions students as passive recipients, restricting their ability to navigate and contribute to the Discourses of a literate community.

In connecting these themes to literacy competence in pedagogical practice, the findings underscore the need for instructional approaches that transcend technical proficiency and embrace literacy as a multidimensional, socially situated practice. As Draper et al. (2005) argue, literacy must be contextualized within the content and disciplinary norms that give it meaning. The emphasis on inclusive and culturally responsive teaching is essential for aligning literacy instruction with the curriculum's broader vision of competence. By shifting towards practices that honor students' diverse experiences, educators can create empowering environments where literacy development encompasses not only technical skills but also the ability to engage critically and meaningfully with texts and social practices.

The limitations of this qualitative study stem from its specific focus and methodological approach. As is common in qualitative research, generalizability is not an objective; rather, the aim is to explore particular contexts in depth. Importantly, the study does not consider students' perspectives or examine the curriculum, which may limit insights into the broader impact of literacy practices on learners. Furthermore, the research refrains from addressing external factors that could influence these practices, focusing solely on the themes identified without assessing their potential effects on student engagement or outcomes. This concentrated approach allows for nuanced understandings but acknowledges the constraints of not encompassing a wider range of influences.

Further research is essential to deepen our understanding of literacy practices within diverse educational contexts. Future studies should not only include students' perspectives but also examine the curricular frameworks that influence literacy instruction. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate how teachers relate to and construct connections with students' home literacy practices and backgrounds. Conducting a discourse analysis that accounts for these contextual factors will provide valuable insights into how literacy is shaped by pedagogical practices, curricular demands, and the unique experiences of students. Expanding research across various educational settings and grade levels will enhance our comprehension of these dynamics.

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