

Systematic Review

Literacies of Transnational Students of Color: A Critical Interpretive Synthesis Through an Intersectionally Informed Critical Race Theory Lens

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Abstract

Although racialization profoundly shapes global education, literacy scholarship concerning transnational students of Color (TSCs) frequently lacks an intersectional lens. This critical interpretive synthesis examines how existing studies conceptualize TSCs' literacies and how their characterizations of race structurally and ideologically de/legitimize these practices. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, we systematically identified, screened, and selected empirical studies, then conducted a critical interpretive synthesis using an intersectionally informed Critical Race Theory framework, reported in accordance with ENTREQ. The review protocol was retrospectively documented and registered on the Open Science Framework. From 1282 initially identified records, 121 studies met the inclusion criteria. Our synthesis indicates that most studies frame literacy as an ideological, translocal, and translanguistic social practice. While outcome-driven institutional norms persistently perpetuate Eurocentric epistemologies, scholarship explicitly naming race exposes enduring colonial legacies. Ultimately, TSCs' literacies function as critical assets for resisting marginalization and writing themselves into the world. Redefining literacy as a racialized yet transformative practice, we propose three major field reorientations: moving from singular to holistic literacies, from individual remediation to structural understandings, and from localized to transnational perspectives.

Keywords: literacy; immigration education; transnationalism; critical race theory; systematic review; transnational literacies



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1. Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2022, the U.S. has become a primary destination for nearly one-fifth of the world's international migrants (Passel et al., 2024). In 2024, approximately 26% of U.S. children under age 18, or 18.3 million children, lived with at least one immigrant parent (Batalova, 2026), a percentage which has rapidly increased from 13% in 1990 to 19% in 2000, 24% in 2010, and is projected to surge to 33% by 2050¹ (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Against this demographic context, we use the term *transnational students of Color* (TSCs) in this critical interpretive synthesis as an analytic designation for K-12 students of Color whose lives and educational experiences are shaped by sustained familial,

social, linguistic, cultural, or political relationships across national borders. Transnationality is therefore an analytic orientation to cross-border relationships and practices, rather than a demographic, mobility, or legal-status category, and it is not used as a synonym for *immigrant*, *migrant*, or *refugee*. We recognize that these source-reported categories carry distinct historical, legal, and educational meanings across national contexts. Accordingly, we neither treat them as interchangeable nor infer a status not reported in the original study. When discussing individual studies in the ensuing review, we retain the authors' terminology and interpret their findings in relation to the population and context identified in that study.

Throughout the review that follows, *migration* refers to processes of cross-border movement and their social, political, and institutional regulation, rather than to a homogeneous student population and *cross-border migration* refers to the movement of people across national boundaries and to the social and institutional conditions organized around that movement. We use *immigration* when referring specifically to entry into, settlement within, or governance by a receiving state. We do not use *migrant* as a general label for the populations represented in the review. Instead, we retain descriptors such as *immigrant*, *refugee*, *asylum-seeking*, or *migrant* only when they are reported by the source literature.

Our decision to focus on these distinct populations in the review is driven by the acknowledgment that TSCs are often segregated by ethnicity, race, language, culture, and poverty from their dominantly perceived counterparts (Duncan & Murnane, 2014), and face unique challenges in developing literacies within and beyond the classroom (P. Smith, 2023; Afolalu, 2024; Kwon et al., 2022). Furthermore, our emphasis on TSCs builds upon historical shifts in educational discourse, moving away from early deficit-based assimilation models (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005) to instead recognize youth identified in foundational immigration scholarship as active agents navigating complex institutional challenges (Gutiérrez et al., 1997; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Over the past two decades, literacy scholars have increasingly challenged assimilationist and deficit-oriented assumptions about students with transnational and migration histories. Rather than treating literacy primarily as an autonomous skill, multilingualism as an obstacle to adaptation, or students' home and community practices as disconnected from academic learning, critical sociocultural scholarship has conceptualized literacies as socially situated resources that move across families, schools, communities, and national borders. This work has unsettled binaries between home and host countries, local and global contexts, and native-speaker and English-learner categories. It has also foregrounded students' multiple affiliations, changing migration histories, digitally mediated networks, plural identities, and participation in transnational social worlds. Table 1 summarizes the principal conceptual reorientations reflected in this scholarship. These orientations are neither mutually exclusive nor strictly sequential; deficit- and asset-based assumptions may coexist across the same historical period and, in some cases, within the same study.

Despite this growing body of research, the highly politicized intersections of race, language, and migration prompt a critical question: How does current scholarship address racialization's impact on TSCs' reading of the word and the world (Freire, 1970)? Addressing this question is particularly urgent amid the global resurgence of racialized, xenophobic, and exclusionary discourses targeting immigrant-origin communities and others perceived as foreign, who must often navigate both "double invisibility" (Bryce-Laporte, 1972) and "double-consciousness" (Du Bois & Marable, 2015). Consequently, this critical review proves indispensable to examining how race and racialization mediate TSCs' literacy practices structurally and ideologically. The need for this review is compounded by the dominance of overly simplified literacy paradigms, such as the "science of reading" (SOR), which frequently reject critically literate discourse (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Luke,

2018; Willis, 2017; Tierney & Pearson, 2024) and impede student flourishing (P. Smith, 2024; Keyes, 2002).

Table 1. Conceptual Reorientations in Scholarship on TSC Literacies.

Analytic Dimension	Deficit-/Assimilation-Oriented Tendency Criticized in the Literature	Asset-Based, Critical, and Transnational Reorientation	Indicators Reflected in This Review	Representative Scholarship
Conception of literacy	Literacy treated as an autonomous, decontextualized, and individually measurable skill	Literacies understood as ideological, socially situated practices shaped by culture, history, and power	Social-practice literacies; critical literacy; family and community literacies	Campano (2007); Gutiérrez (2008); Gutiérrez et al. (1997); P. Smith (2024); Street (1997)
Language and multilingualism	Named-language proficiency and English acquisition treated as primary indicators of competence; multilingual practices framed as interference or deficiency	Students' full linguistic repertoires treated as resources for learning, meaning-making, and participation	Translanguaging; translingual literacy; biliteracy; language brokering	Baker-Bell (2020); Gallo and Hornberger (2019); O. García and Li (2014); Orellana (2009); P. Smith (2019, 2020); Tian (2022)
Students, families, and communities	Educational difficulty attributed primarily to individual, familial, or cultural limitations	Family and community practices recognized as sources of knowledge, expertise, and curricular possibility	Funds of knowledge; community literacies; family language practices; epistemic resources	Campano et al. (2016); Moll et al. (2006); Orellana (2009); P. Smith (2023)
Migration and adaptation	Movement represented through home/host binaries, linear adaptation, and normative expectations of assimilation	Migration understood as multidirectional and transnational, with relationships and practices sustained across borders	Transnational and translocal literacies; cross-border practices; multiple affiliations	Jiménez et al. (2009); Lam and Warriner (2012); Sánchez and Kasun (2012); Skerrett (2015); P. Smith (2022)
Identity and belonging	Identity treated as fixed, nationally bounded, or measured by proximity to dominant norms	Identity understood as plural, relational, diasporic, and continually negotiated across contexts	Hybrid identities; diasporic affiliations; third spaces; transnational identity work	Compton-Lilly et al. (2017); Guo (2025); Gutiérrez (2008); Kwon (2021); Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009); P. Smith (2024)
Race and institutional power	Educational inequalities individualized or discussed without sustained attention to racialization and colonial power	Literacy practices situated within racialized, raciolinguistic, colonial, and institutional structures	Explicit analysis of racism; hegemonic whiteness; linguistic racism; raciolinguistics	Alim et al. (2016); Chu et al. (2026b); Rosa and Flores (2017); P. Smith (2019); Yosso et al. (2009); P. Smith et al. (2022)
Educational purpose	Emphasis on remediation, proficiency, adaptation, and standardized academic outcomes	Emphasis on agency, belonging, critical participation, knowledge production, and flourishing	Counterstorytelling; critical media literacy; social-justice literacies; multimodal composition	Garcia and Mirra (2021); Campano (2007); de los Ríos (2018); Player (2021, 2022); P. Smith et al. (2026)

Note. Table 1 identifies recurring conceptual orientations rather than classifying entire studies as exclusively deficit- or asset-based. The orientations are not mutually exclusive, and individual studies may reproduce deficit assumptions in one analytic dimension while adopting asset-based perspectives in another.

Furthermore, this review emerges from the imperialist U.S. context, where recent mandates designating English as the official language (White House, 2025) collide with escalating racial tensions and post-pandemic xenophobia (da Silva Iddings & Warraich, 2024; Hesson, 2024; Treisman, 2024). Within this hostile landscape, large populations of TSCs, including Latinx, Asian, and Black students from across the diaspora, endure pro-

found marginalization fueled by racialization, linguicism, and the worldwide politicization of migration (Chu et al., 2026a; Lynch et al., 2024; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Wang et al., 2023; Yu, 2021). Given the complex landscape as outlined above, the critical interpretive synthesis of transnational literacy research that ensues is necessary to examine these intersecting inequities across the field.

Moving beyond deficit framing, this critical interpretive synthesis examines empirical literacy research published between 2000 and 2024 through an intersectionally informed CRT lens. To navigate this politicized landscape, we acknowledge the co-naturalization of race and language (Alim et al., 2016; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Broadly, we anchor our analysis in intersectional Critical Race Theory (Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) as applied to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso et al., 2009), bringing intersectional CRT into conversation with scholarship on the autonomy and racialization of migration (De Genova, 2017; Mezzadra, 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Olmos, 2019). Guided by this theoretical nexus, this review addresses two central questions: (1) *What conceptions of literacies are revealed in studies focused on TSCs?* and (2) *How do these studies' characterizations of race and racialization work ideologically and structurally to de/legitimize TSCs' literacies?* By mapping these conceptions, we ultimately aim to inform more just, intersectional approaches to literacy and education research.

In conducting this review, we first define and validate TSCs' literacies by historicizing the intellectual genealogy of scholarship that examines how literacies are enacted, based on multiple named languages and across diverse semiotic modes and contexts, while remaining deeply intertwined with societal structures and power dynamics. Next, we conceptualize the intersectionally informed Critical Race Theory framework, drawing on multiple theoretical strands, including Crenshaw et al. (1995), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and Cabrera (2018), to collectively examine TSCs' literacies at the intersections of race, language, gender, class, and other forms of oppression. Following this, we delineate the methodology of our critical interpretive synthesis in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, implementing a four-pronged process comprising identification of eligible articles for the initial corpus, screening, eligibility, and creation of a refined corpus. We then present our findings in response to the two guiding questions for this review: first, by describing the characteristics of the 121 selected and analyzed studies; and second, by providing an in-depth analysis of 70 studies focusing on the characterization of race and racialization, and explicitly, how these representations of race and racialization function as pathways for legitimization or delegitimization of TSCs' literacies. Finally, we discuss potential implications of our critical interpretive synthesis for the field, highlighting how literacy education can be reoriented from singular notions of literacy to plural literacies, from individual to structural understandings, and from a situatedness in local to transnational contexts.

2. Conceptualizing the Review

We undertake this critical interpretive synthesis of research with a focus on empirical studies conducted over the past two decades, acknowledging that a robust body of scholarship on migration and transnationalism, including the transnational turn in literacy research, have continued to emerge. We were cognizant of the attention—engineered by multiple generations of scholars who have anchored examinations of TSCs in extensive, community-based ethnographic studies and collaborations—to TSCs' “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 2006), advancing the view of these students as positive change agents through asset-based perspectives.

2.1. Historicizing Literacy Research with Transnational Students of Color (TSCs)

As a basis for this review, it was clear that the focus on TSCs in the field of literacy studies has emanated from distinct scholarly junctures in the field, which, together, have confirmed that TSCs' vibrant literacies—though they arise within and through interactions in various spaces, communities, and across borders—remain generally overlooked in formal education (Gutiérrez et al., 1997). For instance, Kris Gutiérrez argued for a sociocritical literacy and Third Space to foster students' cultural and historical awareness, and hybrid language practices, through reading, writing, and performative literacy, thereby creating a robust, equity-oriented criteria for a more just and democratic educational system in an increasingly complex, transnational, hybrid world (Gutiérrez, 2008). Beyond the academic setting, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (now Marjorie Elaine) relied on the cultural modeling framework advanced by Carol Lee (C. D. Lee, 2001) to examine the everyday language and literacy practices of immigrant children and their role as “language brokers” in their families and communities, through extensive ethnographic work, confronting normative deficient assumptions about their literacy proficiency, and forging developmental pathways for TSCs (Orellana, 2009; see also models such as the co-constructed curricular unit on translation from Martínez et al., 2008). Contemporaneously, Gerald Campano presented an innovative language arts curriculum in *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering*, drawing on his experience teaching fifth grade at a multiethnic school where children spoke over 14 different languages, to incorporate students' rich cultural resources, narratives, and identities as “curriculum resources” (Campano, 2007, p. 37), and to “enable contemporary students from immigrant, migrant, and refugee families [to] become more effective agents in their own educational development by drawing upon their own life experiences, values, and literate practices” (p. 14). Subsequently, Gerald Campano, María Paula Ghiso, and Bethany Welch advanced a conceptual framework in *Partnering with Immigrant Communities: Action through Literacy* (Campano et al., 2016), bringing together critical/sociocultural perspectives of literacy, realist theories of identity (grounded in feminist of Color philosophy) and decolonial thought, in an investigation of how practitioner and community-based methodologies can TSCs in their work, while recognizing the population-specific histories and conditions shaping their literacy practices (see also Campano & Ghiso, 2011).

Further extending this extant body of research is the scholarship concerning the literacies of additional U.S.-based populations with transnational and migration histories who are racialized as Latinx, Asian, Black, and other people of Color (e.g., P. Smith et al., 2019; de los Ríos, 2018; Endo, 2016; Flores, 2018; O. García, 2023; Ghiso, 2016; Guo & Sun, 2025; Guo et al., 2026; Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Kwon, 2021; Nuñez, 2021a, 2021b; Park, 2013; Player, 2021, 2022; Qiu, 2025; Sánchez, 2009; Thakurta, 2021). Together, this established yet still emerging scholarship reflects a methodological and conceptual shift in literacy research on TSCs across Latinx, Black, and Asian populations, suggesting that scholars deliberately resist deficit-oriented views of TSCs, foregrounding instead, their language and literacy practices as situated within the complex intersectionalities informed by racialization and transnational contexts.

Table 1 consolidates these analytical distinctions by mapping reorientations from autonomous and deficit-based framings toward ideological, asset-based, structural, and transnational perspectives. These orientations should not be understood as mutually exclusive categories or as stages in a linear historical progression as the orientations may coexist within the same period and, in some cases, within an individual study. This operationalization enabled us to identify both the persistence of assimilationist and racializing logics and the emergence of approaches that recognize TSCs' literacies as situated, dynamic, and socially consequential.

2.2. Conceptualizing the Literacies of Transnational Students of Color

Given the historical insights regarding literacy research conducted with TSCs as highlighted above, in this review, literacy is operationalized as a social and cultural practice, and as a challenge to the traditional autonomous model wherein literacy has been considered as a neutral, universal skill (Street, 1993, 1997). According to Street (1993):

“[The autonomous] model assumes literacy is a single thing, with a big L and a single Y—Literacy. . . readers are treated as though they are autonomous, as though they can be separated from the society that gives meaning to their uses of literacy” (p. 82).

A social approach to literacy advances understandings of “literacy practices” (Street, 1995) as situated in cultural and ideological understandings which give reading and writing meaning (Street, 1995; New London Group, 1996; see also Luke, 2018 and Willis, 2023 on “critical literacy”). Such notions promote a broad definition of literacy—arguing instead for the use of the term “literacies” (Kalantzis et al., 2016) to reflect how meaning-making is enacted based on multiple named languages, across a broad range of semiotics, and spanning multiple environments, while at the same time remaining intertwined with societal structures and power dynamics (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). It is this construct of literacies that we apply in the review that follows (see P. Smith et al., 2025 for a historical overview and rethinking of the connection between traditional and contemporary understandings of “literacies”).

Given the above, this review adopts an ideological framing of literacy for TSCs that extends beyond autonomous models of literacy and assimilation-oriented accounts of migration and immigrant adaptation (Jiménez et al., 2009; Lam & Warriner, 2012). This perspective also complements, while moving beyond, traditional “straight-line assimilation” models (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and ecological and risk-and-resilience paradigms (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) by foregrounding how power relations shape literacy practices alongside educational experiences and outcomes. Instead, we bring an ideological framing of literacies into conversation with critical literacy traditions that emphasize reading both the word and the world (Freire, 1970; Luke, 2018; Willis, 2023). We further connect this perspective with scholarship on the autonomy and racialization of migration (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Olmos, 2019) to avoid treating students’ heterogeneous migration histories and transnational experiences as uniform. Ultimately, this theoretical nexus shifts the focus away from autonomous educational outcomes, working instead to expose systemic racism, recognize the agency and struggles documented across distinct populations, and emphasize holistic literacies as resources for flourishing (P. Smith, 2024; Keyes, 2002).

2.3. Intersectionally Informed Critical Race Theory (CRT)

To examine the literacies of transnational students of Color (TSCs), this review is anchored in an intersectionally informed Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Originating in critical legal studies to challenge oppressive legal structures (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 1989; Matsuda, 1987), CRT was later adapted for education to interrogate systemic racial oppression in schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso et al., 2009). Following this lineage, we define *race* not as a biological determinant of capacity, but as a social construction (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1993). Consequently, *racialization* operates as the mechanism that positions individuals both ideologically, shaping societal perceptions, and structurally, embedding these constructs into the very systems individuals navigate (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Willis, 2017).

We synthesize CRT with foundational Black feminist thought, specifically drawing upon the Combahee River Collective (1977/1995), which established that racial, gender,

and class oppressions operate as interlocking systems. This conceptual groundwork, later termed *intersectionality* by Crenshaw (1991), demands that we analyze marginalization through the lived experiences of those at the nexus of multiple identities. For TSCs, this means their educational experiences cannot be disentangled from the gendered, sexualized, and class-based dimensions of racialization. An intersectional CRT lens allows us to see beyond conventional analyses to recognize both the unique injuries of these interlocking oppressions and the ways transnational youth actively resist and reconfigure these structures (African American Policy Forum, 2021).

Specifically, we utilize six established CRT tenets to examine racialization in transnational literacy research, drawing from Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Yosso et al. (2009), and Cabrera (2018). These tenets include: (1) *Intercentricity of race and racism*, which posits that systemic racism is normal and endemic to daily life, rather than an individual aberration. (2) *Challenge to dominant ideology*, which highlights the collective resistance of people of Color—such as employing translanguaging or borderland literacies to disrupt linguistic hegemony. (3) *Commitment to social justice*, which actively challenges racial essentialism. (4) *Centrality of experiential knowledge and Interdisciplinary perspective*, which together prioritize marginalized voices to unpack unique patterns of oppression—including linguistic racism, nativism, and xenophobia across and within diverse racial groups. (5) Finally, the concept of *Hegemonic Whiteness* (Cabrera, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) provides a nuanced critical theory of racism. Rather than viewing racism as purely deterministic, this tenet acknowledges the probabilistic nature of racial awareness, addresses the realities of internalized racism, and recognizes that individuals within marginalized groups can either uphold or disrupt hegemonic structures (Applebaum, 2010; Cabrera, 2018).

By conceptualizing race through an intersectional lens, we also draw on scholarship concerning linguistic racism (Calvet, 1974)—understood as the racialized hierarchization and delegitimation of languages and literacy practices, and colonial intellectual formation (Fanon, 1961/1963)—understood as the production of knowledge, literate subjectivities, and standards of legitimacy through colonial epistemologies, to examine how language and literacy become implicated in racial and colonial relations. This framework guided our analysis at two related levels. First, we examined whether studies located literacy differences within students, families, or communities, or within institutional histories, racialized language ideologies, and unequal distributions of educational resources and recognition. Second, we examined how studies represented TSCs' multilingual, multimodal, and transnational literacy practices—as deficits to be remediated, as decontextualized skills, or as forms of knowledge, agency, resistance, and social participation. We further considered how race, language, gender, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position operated relationally rather than as separate or merely additive variables.

3. Method for Literature Review

This review employed a critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) design (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006), a form of qualitative evidence synthesis that combines systematic search and screening procedures with a theory-driven interpretive synthesis. CIS was developed for reviews that aim to generate theory about how a body of scholarship constructs its object of study. It is therefore well matched to our guiding questions, which ask what conceptions of literacies are revealed in the corpus and how characterizations of race work ideologically and structurally.

Accordingly, identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and reporting followed PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021; Supplementary File S3). The synthesis stage, our open, pattern, and axial coding within an intersectionally informed CRT framework, is reported in accordance with ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012; Supplementary File S4). The databases,

search terms, eligibility criteria, screening and selection procedures, extraction fields, synthesis approach, and appraisal procedure were established by the research team before screening commenced and have been retrospectively documented and deposited as a public, timestamped registration on the Open Science Framework (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/BNVGS>). We note the absence of prospective registration as a limitation.

Following these guidelines, the searches yielded 2308 records. After 1026 duplicates were removed, 1282 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. To assess relevance, at least two research team members independently screened all titles and abstracts against the prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria. As authors, our transdisciplinary expertise includes transnational language and literacy in early childhood, elementary, and middle and secondary grades; our racial/ethnic identities reflect Asian, Black, Caribbean, and White backgrounds. Our diverse backgrounds and research expertise surrounding transnational literacies afforded us synergy as well as a critical lens as we engaged in this research. We constantly exchanged feedback across the scholarly collective, relying on each other's perspectives and reflecting our own, which we believe proved indispensable to the strengthening of this research.

3.1. Design and Search Process

After the final corpus was established, we conducted an iterative, theory-informed qualitative analysis using open, pattern, and axial coding and an intersectionally informed CRT framework. To address our guiding questions: (1) What conceptions of literacies are revealed in studies focused on transnational students of Color (TSCs)? and (2) How do the studies' characterizations of race and racialization work ideologically and structurally to de/legitimize TSCs' literacies? We conducted a critical interpretive synthesis of empirical peer-reviewed studies, following PRISMA 2020 for identification and screening. We used a four-pronged process: (1) identification of eligible articles for the initial corpus; (2) screening; (3) eligibility; and (4) creation of a refined corpus.

3.1.1. Identification

Informed by the processes used for previous systematic reviews conducted across the fields of literacy and education more broadly (e.g., Risko et al., 2008; Souto-Manning et al., 2022; Wetzel et al., 2019), we selected three databases notable for literature searches in these areas to explore and identify articles: (a) Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC); (b) EBSCO-Academic Search Premier; and (c) PsycINFO. We conducted searches in each database using four categories of search terms generated from the praxis of our theoretical framework and research questions: (a) transnationality- and migration-related retrieval terms (e.g., transnational, immigrant, refugee, across-borders, English learner, bilingual, multilingual, and first-/second-generation)²; (b) literacy (e.g., reading, writing, literacies, English language arts); (c) racialization (e.g., race, racism, colonialism); and (d) students of Color (e.g., children, students, youth, African American students, Latinx students, Asian students, Black Students, Haitian students, etc.) (Table 2).

We used the Boolean operator "AND" to create search statements using a combination of synonyms from the four specified categories. All team members conducted a cross-check of the search results, and we repeated the search twice to ensure accuracy and exhaust all relevant search terms. In addition to the major database search, we also searched several major high-impact literacy journals (e.g., *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Literacy Research and Instruction*) and reviewed and searched the references of each selected article to yield more articles. The search yielded 2308 articles. Upon removing 1026 duplications, a total of 1282 remained as the initial corpus.

Table 2. Search Terms for Review.

Concepts	Transnationality- and Migration-Related Identifiers	Literacy	Race/Racialization	Students of Color
Keywords and synonyms	Transnational			Student
	Across-borders			High school
	English learners			Middle school
	Bilingual		Race	Elementary school
	Multilingual		Racialization	Community Center
	Immigrant	Literacy	Racism	Latino
	First-generation	Reading	Colonialism	Latina
	Second-generation	Writing	Ethnicization	Hispanic
	Refugee	Literacies	Marginalization	Latinx
	Undocumented	English language arts	Discrimination	African
	Diaspora	Fluency	Othering	African American
	Foreign-born		Stereotype	Black Students
	Newcomer			Haitian students
	Asylum-seeking			Asian students
	Global			

3.1.2. Screening and Eligibility

The screening process for the initial pool of 1282 eligible articles involved a thorough reading of all articles' titles and abstracts. Each record was independently screened by at least two members of the research team using the same five inclusion criteria and three exclusion criteria described below. Each reviewer assessed whether the title and abstract provided sufficient evidence that the study met the review's population, educational-level, empirical, literacy-related, and publication criteria. When reviewers reached different inclusion or exclusion decisions, the record and the relevant eligibility criterion were discussed by the research team until consensus was reached. Because screening assignments were distributed across members of the research team and disagreements were reconciled through an iterative consensus process, a formal inter-rater reliability coefficient was not calculated during the original screening. We therefore report the decision-making and reconciliation procedures rather than calculating a retrospective coefficient from the final, consensus-based decisions.

The first inclusion criterion was the focus of the study. To meet the population criterion, a study had to focus on K-12 students of Color and provide evidence that their lives, educational experiences, identities, or literacy practices were shaped by sustained relationships, practices, or institutions extending across national borders. Such evidence could include cross-border familial and communicative relationships, transnational literacy practices, diasporic affiliations, migration histories, or engagement with institutions governing cross-border mobility. Labels such as immigrant, migrant, refugee, newcomer, bilingual, or English learner were not independently sufficient for inclusion. These criteria were particularly essential because, despite this review being undergirded by an intersectionally informed approach to CRT, our aim was to specifically explore how race and racialization played a role in TSCs' literacies. Thus, it was expected that intersectionalities identified in each study would be addressed in relation to the construct of literacies as an intentional, central, and clearly articulated focus of the study. In this way, our emphasis remained centered on how race and racialization, as operationalized by an intersectionally informed CRT, were characterized in TSCs' literacies across the research studies examined.

The second inclusion criterion concerned the focal participants and educational settings represented in each study. Studies focused on participants in K-12; both in-school and out-of-school settings (i.e., home, camps, libraries) were included. Studies focused solely on participants in college, or post-high school, were excluded. Additionally, studies

where students are mentioned but where teachers(s) functioned as central participants, and studies where students were present, but the family unit was central to the analysis, were also excluded. We acknowledge that teachers and families influence TSCs' K-12 experiences, as reflected in our inclusion of studies conducted in out-of-school settings; however, given the limited synthesis of this body of scholarship, we considered it important to maintain a focused unit of analysis centered on individual TSCs in order to explore how race and racialization shape their literacy experiences and perspectives.

The third inclusion criterion was the nature of the study. Only empirical studies with a clear, thorough research design, informed in part by measures outlined in Risko et al. (2008) were included, thereby excluding conceptual studies, literature review studies, books, and dissertations. The fourth inclusion criterion was the publication date of the study. Studies published between the year 2000 and September 2024 (when we concluded the search) were included. The decision for this criterion was based in part on the recognition of the influential 2001 publication of Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco's seminal work, *Children of Immigrants*, which served as a basis for researching transnational students from the perspective of their social contexts and how they were received by institutions in their countries of destination. A focus on this timeframe also allowed access to the transnational turn in literacy research, as demarcated by the recognition of literacy scholars (e.g., Jiménez et al., 2009; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; Skerrett, 2012, 2015; Warriner, 2007) of "transnational literacy/literacies" as a mechanism for producing and functionally interpreting the word and world by people of transnational origin (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; R. C. Smith, 2006). Furthermore, the timeline chosen for this review is aligned with the transitioning of the concept of "Critical Race Theory" from legal studies (see Crenshaw et al., 1995) to the field of education, as orchestrated by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and the uptake of constructs of race and racism in transnational literacy research thereafter.

The final inclusion criterion was the language of the study's publication. Studies published in English, regardless of the locale of study implementation, were included. The review was limited to articles published in English to maintain a feasible and consistent process of searching, screening, and analyzing studies across the selected databases. The research team did not have the resources necessary to conduct systematic searches across multiple non-English-language databases or to ensure consistent and validated translation of studies published in the range of languages potentially relevant to this transnational body of scholarship. This criterion was therefore based on the practical scope of the review rather than an assumption that English-language scholarship is more rigorous, relevant, or representative.

As a result of this screening process, we excluded 1130 articles that did not meet, in whole or in part, one or all of the five inclusion criteria. A total of 152 articles were identified for a full-text eligibility review in the next stage.

3.1.3. Refining for Creation of a Final Corpus

During the full-text eligibility stage, the first author reviewed all 152 articles in conjunction with the third and fourth authors, after which the second author conducted an additional review of the corpus and the preliminary eligibility decisions. Reviewers evaluated each article's theoretical framework, research purpose and questions, participant population, educational setting, methodology, and findings, with particular attention to its conception of literacy and relevance to the six tenets of the intersectionally informed CRT framework. The authors compared their eligibility judgments across several meetings. Cases involving different interpretations of the inclusion criteria were revisited collectively, and a final decision was made through discussion and consensus. Following this process, 31 articles were excluded because they did not focus on K-12 students and/or did not cen-

trally examine literacy in relation to TSCs' experiences in school or out-of-school contexts. The resulting corpus consisted of 121 articles. Figure 1 presents the complete PRISMA flow process.

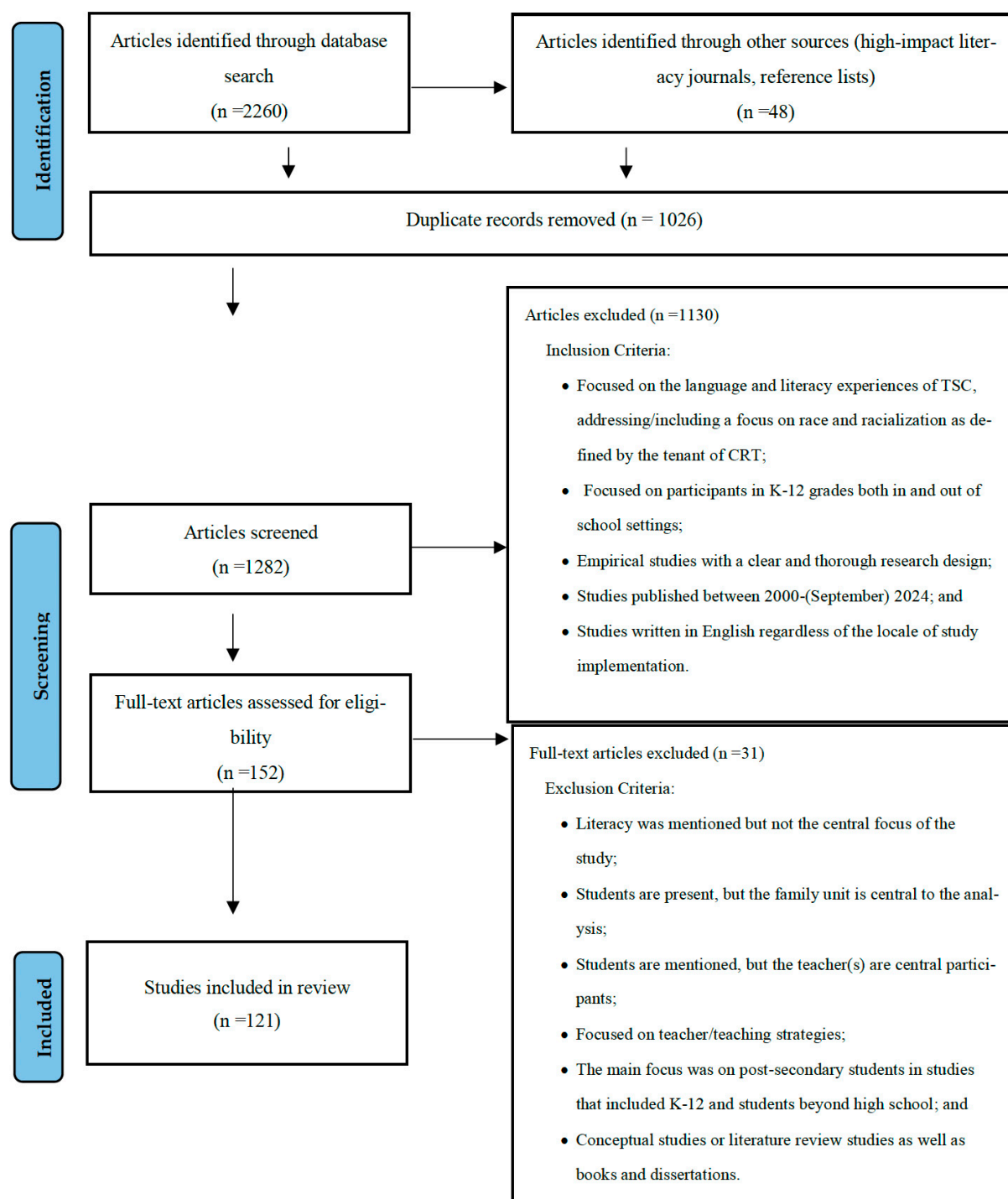


Figure 1. Search Process Results.

3.2. Analysis

We analyzed the final 121 articles using an inductive paradigmatic process (Risko et al., 2008). Each article was read in full and summarized in a shared Excel spreadsheet that served as the master record for the analysis. For each study, we recorded its conceptualization of literacy, evidence related to the six tenets of intersectionally informed CRT, and

attention to race and racialization. These evidence-based summaries provided the basis for preliminary coding and enabled the authors to compare coding decisions across the corpus.

To address the first research question, we used a two-stage inductive process to analyze studies' conceptions of literacy. First, through open coding, we identified how each study defined, emphasized, or enacted literacy. The initial codes and supporting examples were used to categorize the primary conception of literacy as "ideological" or "autonomous," while recognizing that these orientations were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Second, we used pattern coding to compare the initial codes across studies, note their prevalence, and refine them into categories and emerging themes. These categories included named-language modality (e.g., translanguaging, biliteracy, and language brokering), locality (e.g., transnational literacy and transborder literacy), and transmodality (e.g., digital literacy, multimodal literacy, media literacy, and transcultural digital literacy). The authors collectively reviewed the coding summaries and examples before finalizing the categories and themes.

To address the second research question, we used a two-stage process to analyze studies' characterizations of race and racialization. First, we deductively coded all studies using six tenets of intersectionally informed CRT: intercentricity of race and racism, challenge to dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, centrality of experiential knowledge, interdisciplinary perspectives, and hegemony and Hegemonic Whiteness (Cabrer^a, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso et al., 2009). Based on the extent to which these tenets were incorporated into each study's conceptual framing, design, methods, and findings, we categorized and color-coded each study as having a: (a) *substantive* focus, when it explicitly addressed race, racism, or an intersecting form of oppression; (b) *moderate* focus, when it did not explicitly name race or racism but addressed one or more relevant CRT tenets; or (c) *cursory* focus, when it did not meaningfully address race, racism, or an intersecting form of oppression. Second, we conducted an in-depth inductive analysis of the studies categorized as having a substantive focus, examining how their characterizations of race and racism, including attention to hegemony and Hegemonic Whiteness, ideologically or structurally legitimized or delegitimized TSCs' literacies (see Supplementary File S1). We then used axial coding to identify relationships between conceptions of literacy and broader patterns of race and racialization.

Across both analyses, first four authors reviewed the coding entries, supporting summaries, categories, and emerging themes recorded in the shared spreadsheet during a series of virtual meetings over a three-week period. When interpretations differed, the authors returned to the relevant article and coding definition, compared the supporting evidence, and discussed the decision until consensus was reached. Agreed-upon revisions were recorded in the master spreadsheet and applied consistently across the corpus.

Quality Appraisal. Following completion of the synthesis, we appraised the methodological reporting of the 70 substantive-focus studies using the CASP Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2018). We appraised this subset rather than the full corpus because all interpretive claims in this review derive from these studies. Three team members (first, third and fifth authors) each independently appraised a non-overlapping allocation (34, 18, and 18), and the first author independently re-appraised a randomly selected 20% sample (14) drawn from the other authors' allocations, who were not informed in advance which of their studies had been sampled. Item-level agreement was 96.4%, with no study differing on more than one of the ten items; discrepancies were resolved by discussion and the consensus rating is reported. Studies authored by members of the review team were appraised by a team member who was not an author of the original study. Four studies employing quantitative or mixed-methods designs were retained in the corpus and in all analyses but were not appraised, as CASP Qualitative is not interpretable for those designs. Consistent

with critical interpretive synthesis, appraisal was used to characterize the evidence base rather than to determine inclusion (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006); no study was excluded on this basis. Item-level results appear in Supplementary File S5.

Assessment of the Evidence Base. Because the review generates theory about how a body of scholarship constructs its object of study rather than aggregating findings toward a decision-relevant conclusion, we did not apply the full GRADE-CERQual framework (Lewin et al., 2015), three of whose four components presuppose a review of the latter kind. We instead adapted CERQual's adequacy of data component, which bears directly on how much evidence supports each interpretive claim. For every theme reported in the Findings, Supplementary File S6 documents the number of contributing studies, the populations and geographic contexts represented across those studies, and the range of methodological designs employed, so that readers can assess the evidentiary base of each claim directly.

3.3. Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations to this review. First, the review protocol was documented and deposited retrospectively rather than registered prospectively. Although the search strategy, eligibility criteria, and screening procedures were established before screening commenced, we recognize that retrospective documentation offers weaker protection than prospective registration. Second, although we sought to include research beyond the U.S. context, our individual linguistic repertoires restricted our corpus to English-language publications. Consequently—and presenting a third limitation—while we aimed to problematize the U.S. as a dominant “Minority World” (Panelli et al., 2007) context in transnational literacy research, our findings inevitably overrepresent U.S.-based studies due to their prevalence in English-language scholarship. Fourth, while we center racialization, space constraints prevented a comprehensive analysis of how immigration status intersects with translingualism. Although we recorded the population and migration or legal categories reported by source studies, reporting practices were inconsistent across national and disciplinary contexts. We therefore do not compare immigrant, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, or undocumented students as internally homogeneous groups. Most notably, undocumented students and students in mixed-status families are rarely represented in the studies foundational to this review, inadvertently limiting our discussion of how “illegality” impacts students' literacies. Fifth, timeframe constraints required us to focus exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles rather than scholarly books; however, we mitigated this by prioritizing articles from scholars who have authored pivotal books in the field. Finally, we restricted our scope to the K-12 context, recognizing that institutional structures beyond K-12 differ so substantially that they demand distinct analytical approaches outside the purview of this review.

4. Findings

This review documents how literacy research has addressed transnational students of Color (TSCs) over the past 24 years. Specifically, we examine how the intersections of literacy, race, and racialization shape each study's contribution to the field. In the following sections, we first present the descriptive characteristics of the included studies graphically. Second, we present a CRT-informed synthesis of the patterns generated through our qualitative analysis based on our two guiding questions: (1) What conceptions of literacies are revealed in studies focused on TSCs? and (2) How do these studies' characterizations of race and racialization work ideologically and structurally to de/legitimize TSCs' literacies? Finally, we discuss overarching themes and offer recommendations for equitably researching TSC literacies to better support student flourishing.

4.1. Descriptive Characteristics of Studies

Across the corpus of 121 studies, descriptive indications reflected studies published primarily in literacy journals were undertaken primarily in school, home, family, and community contexts focused more readily on Latinx and Asian ethnicities, relied foundationally on qualitative methodologies, and geographically occurred primarily in the United States. Supplementary File S2 presents a descriptive overview of the corpus of 121 studies.

4.2. Conceptions of Literacies and Corresponding Characterizations of Race and Racialization

Across the empirical studies included in this review, a predominant conception of literacy emerged: (a) literacies theorized as a social practice; (b) literacies theorized translocally; (c) literacies theorized translinguistically; and (d) literacies theorized transmodally. See Table 3 for a detailed conception of the literacies of each study reviewed.

Table 3. Summary of Conceptions of Literacy.

Literacies Theorized as a Social Practice	“Family and Community” vs. “School” Literacies	Bauer and Sánchez (2020); Boateng et al. (2024); Braden (2020); Chao and Ma (2019); Choi et al. (2014); Compton-Lilly et al. (2017); Cuero (2010); Cun (2021); Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia (2018); Dávila et al. (2017); de la Piedra (2010); Mangual Figueroa et al. (2014); Flores (2019); Flores (2022); A. García and Gaddes (2012); O. García et al. (2013); Gutiérrez et al. (2011); Hsin (2017); LeBlanc (2017); Lundqvist and Erduyan (2025); McLean (2012); Nuñez et al. (2024); Park (2013); Player (2022); Rubinstein-Ávila (2007); Skerrett and Bomer (2013); P. Smith et al. (2019, 2022)
	Social Justice Literacies	Bajaj et al. (2017b); Bajaj et al. (2017a); Bryan (2020); Cammarota and Aguilera (2012); Caraballo (2017); Daniel (2019); de los Ríos (2020); Endo (2016); Flores (2018); Fránquiz and Salinas (2011); O. García (2023); Garcia and Mirra (2021); Guo (2024); Knight et al. (2004); C. C. Lee et al. (2021); Medina (2005); Nuñez (2022); Player (2021); Sanchez (2009); Seraphin (2023); Son (2022); Souto-Manning et al. (2016); Vehabovic (2021); González Ybarra (2020)
Literacies Theorized Translocally	Transnational Literacies	Becker (2023); Compton-Lilly et al. (2019a); Compton-Lilly et al. (2019b); de los Ríos (2018); Ghiso (2016); Huang et al. (2024); Kwon (2020); Kwon (2021); Kwon et al. (2019); Kwon (2022); Kwon et al. (2022); Lam (2009a); Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009); Lam and Wu (2025); C. Lee (2025); Machado and Hartman (2021); Noguerón-Liu and Driscoll (2021); Pandya et al. (2015); Quast and Taira (2021); Sanchez (2007); Taira (2019); Vargas (2006)
	Transborder Literacies	de la Piedra and Araujo (2012); Durán and Aguilera (2022); Dutro and Haberl (2018); Flores (2023); Gonzales et al. (2020); Linares (2021); Linares (2022); Medina (2010); Nuñez and Urrieta (2021)
Literacies Theorized Transmodally	Multimodal Literacies	Gilhooly et al. (2019); Honeyford (2013b); Kennedy et al. (2019); G. M. Kim and Omerbašić (2017); Lam (2009b); Lam (2014); Lytra (2011); McGinnis et al. (2007); Pyo (2016); Skerrett (2012); Thakurta (2021); Zhang and Heydon (2014);
	Media Literacies	Bruinenberg et al. (2021); Deroo and Mohamud (2022)
	Transcultural Digital Literacies	Bruna (2007); G. M. Kim (2016); Li and Hawkins (2021)
	Digital Literacies	Lam and Christiansen (2022)

Table 3. *Cont.*

Literacies Theorized Translinguistically	Translingual Literacies	de los Ríos (2022b); Dewilde (2019); Dorner et al. (2007); Dorner et al. (2008); Peñalva (2017); Worthly et al. (2016)
	Translanguaging Literacies	Daniel and Pacheco (2016); de los Ríos (2022a); S. Kim (2018); Martínez-Álvarez and Ghiso (2017); Martínez et al. (2017); Nuñez (2021b); Nuñez (2021a); Zhao and Flewitt (2020)
	“Biliteracies”	Bartlett (2007); Dao (2021); Gallo and Hornberger (2019); Ramos-Salazar et al. (2023); Somé-Guiébré (2016)

Correspondingly, across a total of 121 studies, 70 studies (see Table 4) of literacies of transnational students of Color (TSCs) were theorized in relation to how they explicitly addressed race and racism, primarily as a function of the element of CRT named “intercentricity of race and racism” and secondarily as a function of the element of CRT named “hegemony and Hegemonic Whiteness” (Cabrera, 2018). Notably, due to the multifaceted nature of racialization experienced by TSCs, some studies that we present may fall into more than one of the four categories below. Notwithstanding, we address each study within exclusively defined categories in lieu of the function they performed in legitimizing or delegitimizing TSCs and their literacies. These categories are: (1) transformed traditional pathways, (2) complexified intersectional avenues, (3) questioned educational systems, and (4) geographically oriented avenues. Below, we discuss these four major patterns emerging from this review through which studies reflected explicit representations of race and racialization as pathways for legitimization or delegitimization of TSCs and their literacies. Along with each of these patterns, we also discuss conceptions of literacies that prevailed, highlighting the ways in which they help to address race and racialization in the literacies of TSCs.

Table 4. Representations of Critical Race Theory.

Number of Studies	CRT Tenets Studies Addressed	Studies
70	• Intercentricity of Race & Racism (explicit) • Challenge to the Dominant Ideology • Commitment to Social Justice • Centrality of Experiential Knowledge • Interdisciplinary Perspective • Hegemony of Whiteness	Bajaj et al. (2017b); Bajaj et al. (2017a); Bruinenberg et al. (2021); Bruna (2007); Cammarota and Aguilera (2012); Choi et al. (2014); Cuero (2010); Cun (2021); Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia (2018); Daniel (2019); de la Piedra (2010); de la Piedra and Araujo (2012); de los Ríos (2018, 2020, 2022b); Deroo and Mohamud (2022); Durán and Aguilera (2022); Dutro and Haberl (2018); Endo (2016); Mangual Figueroa et al. (2014); Flores (2018, 2019, 2022, 2023); Fránquiz and Salinas (2011); A. García and Gaddes (2012); Garcia and Mirra (2021); O. García et al. (2013); O. García (2023); Ghiso (2016); Gonzales et al. (2020); Guo (2024); Gutiérrez et al. (2011); Hsin (2017); Irizarry and Kleyn (2011); Kennedy et al. (2019); G. M. Kim (2016); G. M. Kim and Omerbašić (2017); Knight et al. (2004); Kwon (2021); Lam (2014); C. Lee (2025); C. C. Lee et al. (2021); Linares (2021, 2022); Machado and Hartman (2021); McGinnis et al. (2007); Noguérón-Liu and Driscoll (2021); Nuñez and Urrieta (2021); Nuñez et al. (2024); Nuñez (2021a, 2021b, 2022); Park (2013); Player (2021, 2022); Quast and Taira (2021); Ramos-Salazar et al. (2023); Rubinstein-Ávila (2007); Sánchez (2009); Seraphin (2023); P. Smith et al. (2019, 2022); Somé-Guiébré (2016); Son (2022); Souto-Manning et al. (2016); Thakurta (2021); Vargas (2006); Vehabovic (2021); González Ybarra (2020)

4.3. Representations of Race and Racialization

Appraisal of the 66 qualitatively designed studies among the substantive-focus set yielded scores ranging from 5 to 10 (median = 9). Every study reported clear aims, an appropriate qualitative methodology, a clear statement of findings, and a discussion of the value of the research. Two items were unmet far more often than the rest: consideration of ethical issues was rated Yes for only 22 studies, and consideration of the researcher–participant relationship for 49. In most such cases, the study named pseudonyms but reported no ethical approval or informed consent, or described the research setting without a positionality statement. The items bearing most directly on analytic rigor, appropriateness of design, adequacy of data collection, and rigor of analysis, were met by the large majority of studies. We therefore read this pattern as a feature of how literacy research has been reported rather than of how it has been conducted. We report it because it bears on what the corpus makes visible, not as grounds for discounting any study’s findings.

The number of studies contributing to each theme; the populations, geographic contexts, and methodological designs represented within each are documented in Supplementary File S6.

4.3.1. Transformed Traditional Pathways

Characterizations of race and racialization functioned in many cases as mechanisms for transformation of TSCs’ literacies across contexts, with a tendency to emphasize ideological representations of race and with a less substantive focus on structural representations.

Asset-based Multiliteracies as Sites of Racial Reflection. Across the 32 studies in this corpus, researchers demonstrated how racially conscious, asset-based multiliteracies positively influenced the racialization experiences of transnational students of Color (TSCs). These practices spanned multicultural and multilingual reading (Braden, 2020; A. García & Gaddes, 2012; Guo, 2024; C. Lee, 2025; Vehabovic, 2021), writing (Dutro & Haberl, 2018; Flores, 2018, 2023; Linares, 2021), pedagogy and curriculum (e.g., Bajaj et al., 2017b; de los Ríos, 2018; Flores, 2019; Nuñez et al., 2024), and multimodal practices (e.g., Bruinenberg et al., 2021; Garcia & Mirra, 2021; Vargas, 2006). Crucially, a focus on race and racialization allowed these literacies to function as ideological tools. They offered TSCs opportunities to amplify voices marginalized in white-dominant literacy spaces, reflect on their hybrid identities, and thrive by utilizing their full linguistic, cultural, and transnational resources.

Validating Marginalized Perspectives Through Text-Based Literacy. Nine studies specifically examined how TSCs interrogated race, power dynamics, and identity through text-based literacies, such as multicultural children’s literature (Braden, 2020; A. García & Gaddes, 2012; Guo, 2024; C. Lee, 2025; Vehabovic, 2021) and writing (Dutro & Haberl, 2018; Flores, 2018, 2023; Linares, 2021). By centering the distinct racialized experiences of Black, Latinx, and Asian youth, including students from refugee backgrounds where explicitly identified, culturally responsive instruction empowered TSCs to articulate how racism shaped their perceptions of themselves, social justice, and societal power dynamics. For example, Braden (2020) highlighted how critical readings of children’s literature fostered racial awareness, enabling students to confront the structural impacts of anti-Black racism and police brutality on the Black immigrant families and communities represented in the study.

Furthermore, when refined through racially conscious instruction, writing—a fundamental traditional literacy practice—empowered TSCs to reflect on encounters with xenophobia and exclusionary immigration enforcement and policies, including fear of police encounters and the trauma of deportation (Dutro & Haberl, 2018). Establishing transnational writing spaces within classrooms proved transformative, instantiating “ideological borderlands” that allowed TSCs to counter social and political exclusion (Linares, 2021). Flores (2018, 2023) documented a “third space” where TSCs challenged injustice through

writing and performance, fostering critical engagement by validating diverse languages and intersecting experiences of immigration, class, and gender. Ultimately, incorporating transnational funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019) disrupted dominant, white-centered conceptions of literacy, offering students authentic means to reflect on their communities.

Validating Marginalized Perspectives through Asset-Based Curriculum and Pedagogy. Fourteen studies explored TSCs' engagement with asset-based curricula and pedagogy (Bajaj et al., 2017a, 2017b; de los Ríos, 2018, 2020; Durán & Aguilera, 2022; Mangual Figueroa et al., 2014; Flores, 2019, 2022; Fránquiz & Salinas, 2011; Ghiso, 2016; Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Machado & Hartman, 2021; Nuñez et al., 2024; Thakurta, 2021). These culturally rooted frameworks included Chicanx and Latinx border literacy (de los Ríos, 2018), family heritage workshops (Flores, 2019, 2022), curricula examining racialized xenophobic rhetoric surrounding immigration (Durán & Aguilera, 2022) and pivotal U.S. civil rights movements (Fránquiz & Salinas, 2011). Methodologies ranged from photovoice compositions (de los Ríos, 2020) and multilingual civic pedagogies (Ghiso, 2016; Thakurta, 2021) to human rights education (Bajaj et al., 2017a, 2017b). Highlighting the value of informal practices, Nuñez et al. (2024) explored how Latina middle school girls utilized chisme (gossip) as a powerful, culturally specific literacy practice, validating linguistic forms typically stigmatized in formal schooling.

Collectively, these researchers designed historically authentic curricula by infusing transnational texts, multimedia compositions, and critical discussions to navigate complex border issues and global racialized realities (de los Ríos, 2018; Durán & Aguilera, 2022; Machado & Hartman, 2021). In doing so, they problematized the structural dominance of whiteness in school curricula, which renders the border-crossing experiences of TSCs invisible (Bryce-Laporte, 1972) within dominant "academic literacy" frameworks.

Validating Racialized Experiences through Multimodal Literacy. Nine studies—eight in the U.S. (de los Ríos, 2022b; Deroo & Mohamud, 2022; Garcia & Mirra, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2020; G. M. Kim, 2016; G. M. Kim & Omerbašić, 2017; McGinnis et al., 2007; Vargas, 2006) and one in the Netherlands (Bruinenberg et al., 2021)—examined how TSCs utilized critical media literacy and multimodal storytelling to negotiate intersecting identities. These studies revealed how race, cultural affiliation, and, where explicitly reported, immigration or legal status shaped participants' digital engagement. For instance, Korean-descent TSCs engaged with global media (e.g., K-dramas) as an act of cultural resistance against marginalizing dominant norms (G. M. Kim, 2016). Similarly, participants identified by McGinnis et al. (2007) as immigrant youth used digital activism to construct resilient identities and employed counter-storytelling to challenge Islamophobia by connecting with the global Muslim community (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Furthermore, critical media curricula focused on Latin music and dance allowed Latinx TSCs to affirm their transnational identities (Vargas, 2006). Moving toward future-building, Garcia and Mirra (2021) advocated for "speculative civic literacies," where students leverage digital tools (e.g., blogs, online mapping) to reframe oppressive policy narratives and construct liberatory civic futures.

Crucially, these studies critiqued how "Anglo media" targets global adolescents by perpetuating "race-bending racism" and ambiguous racial stereotypes (Vargas, 2006). To combat this, scholars advocated for reflexive media literacy education that empowers global TSCs to navigate and challenge embedded biases. Beyond digital platforms, emerging multimodal practices—such as Chicanx/Latinx podcast projects (de los Ríos, 2022b) and engagements with global television (G. M. Kim & Omerbašić, 2017)—offered creative outlets for TSCs to situate their personal experiences within broader critiques of linguistic and racial oppression. Amid heightened racialized xenophobia and increasingly exclu-

sionary migration politics, these transformative multiliteracies empowered TSCs to resist assimilation, reclaim their identities, and construct vital spaces of solidarity.

Family and Community Literacies as Sites of Racial Reflection. Seven studies examined the literacies of transnational students of Color (TSCs) across diverse out-of-school settings, including within families (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2004; Quast & Taira, 2021), local communities (Noguerón-Liu & Driscoll, 2021), and cross-border contexts (de la Piedra & Araujo, 2012; Gonzales et al., 2020; Kwon, 2021). These studies underscored the critical importance of non-academic platforms, demonstrating how TSCs leverage family and community-engaged practices to develop transnational funds of knowledge. By validating daily literacy practices—whether interacting with family and friends, navigating rural and urban spaces, or maintaining life across borders—these researchers legitimized the strategies TSCs use to navigate new educational systems and confront discrimination within receiving-country institutions and local communities.

Specifically, Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study following TSCs from diverse racial backgrounds from primary through high school. Their research highlighted how students asserted their identities across home and community contexts while actively navigating racial and linguistic bias within monolingual, English-dominant school environments. Ultimately, this body of research emphasized the necessity of forging family and community partnerships with dominant schools. Recognizing and supporting the rich transnational experiences that shape TSCs' literacy practices serves to challenge and disrupt the hierarchical power imbalances frequently instantiated between nondominant parents and formal educational institutions.

4.3.2. Complexified Intersectional Avenues

Across contexts, characterizations of race and racialization shaped TSCs' literacies in ways that emphasized ideological understandings of race—beliefs and cultural norms—while comparatively structural forces, including systemic inequities, institutional practices, and policies, received less attention.

Interrupting linguistic racism through intersectionality. Twenty-two studies highlighted the pervasive roles of “linguistic racism” (Anzaldúa, 1987; Calvet, 1974) and “linguicism” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988) in shaping TSCs' educational experiences in the United States. These constructs intersect powerfully with race and culture. Across diverse backgrounds, studies demonstrated how restrictive language policies and monolingual, English-centric environments marginalize TSCs by failing to accommodate their full linguistic repertoires (Alim, 2004; O. García & Li, 2014; Bruna, 2007; Linares, 2021; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007).

While a common experience of marginalization emerged, studies also revealed how linguistic racism affects specific racial and cultural groups differently. A growing body of scholarship interrogates xenophobic and colonial structures that racialize Latinx TSCs and institutionally position them as “limited English proficient” (Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012; Mangual Figueroa et al., 2014; O. García, 2023; O. García et al., 2013; Gonzales et al., 2020; Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Nuñez, 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Nuñez & Urrieta, 2021). These scholars advocate for creating “third spaces” and implementing flexible translanguaging practices to affirm students' full linguistic repertoires. Furthermore, Ramos-Salazar et al. (2023) challenged the misconception that bilingualism impedes academic development by demonstrating that Latinx TSCs who spoke only English or only Spanish had lower reading scores than their bilingual peers.

Linguistic marginalization uniquely impacts other diaspora communities as well. Endo (2016) illustrated how 1.5-generation Japanese students encountered racialized linguicism, where perceived “foreignness” exacerbated their marginalization in urban high

schools. Similarly, researchers documented how African and Burmese TSCs face severe academic restriction when classified as “non-fluent” (Cun, 2021; Somé-Guiébré, 2016), while Bryan (2020) highlighted how an African TSC faced peer ridicule for deviating from American English norms. Furthermore, studies focusing on TSCs from refugee backgrounds consistently elaborated on the linguistic devaluation and erasure imposed by dominant educational institutions (Daniel, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019).

Applying quantitative methods to large datasets (e.g., PISA), P. Smith et al. (2019, 2022) examined the reading literacies of Black immigrant youth. They revealed how raciolinguistic ideologies and systemic racism structurally marginalize Black TSCs within literacy assessments. Ultimately, this body of research advances the recognition of TSCs’ linguistic identities as assets, urging educators to dismantle linguisticism and build equitable foundations for authentic engagement.

Disrupting Racism at the Intersections of Immigration, Class, and Gender. Nine studies comprehensively examined how race operates within intersecting systems of oppression—including gender (Player, 2021, 2022; Sanchez, 2009; Seraphin, 2023; Souto-Manning et al., 2016; González Ybarra, 2020), class (Sanchez, 2009), and immigration status (Irizarry & Kleyn, 2011; McGinnis et al., 2007)—and how these dynamics impact TSC literacies. By situating racialization within these broader sociopolitical frameworks, the research highlighted compounded vulnerabilities and the urgent need for expansive educational systems.

Exploring the intersection of race, immigration-related legal positioning, and economic inequality, Irizarry and Kleyn (2011) illustrated how Latinx TSCs face legal and economic barriers that heighten racial discrimination and reinforce social inequities. Conversely, McGinnis et al. (2007) demonstrated how Colombian, Indian, and Jewish TSCs actively resist racialized, exclusionary narratives directed at immigrant communities by constructing resilient identities through storytelling and activism. Scholars frequently utilized intersectionality to illuminate how social class and gender compound racialization for Latina/o and Black TSCs (Bauer & Sánchez, 2020; Sanchez, 2009; Seraphin, 2023; Souto-Manning et al., 2016). For example, Bauer and Sánchez (2020) explored how three Haitian TSCs navigated the intersection of racism and classism, forced to reconcile American stereotypes of Haiti as economically deprived with their own identity formation. Highlighting gendered racialization, Souto-Manning et al. (2016) documented how a Muslim African boy was disproportionately targeted for behavioral interventions and labeled “aggressive,” reflecting systemic biases that marginalize boys of Color and demanding a shift away from deficit-focused literacy practices.

A vital, growing body of scholarship centers the literacies of girls and women of Color (Player, 2021, 2022; González Ybarra, 2020). González Ybarra (2020) advocated for *Mujerista* Literacies—grounded in Chicana/Latina feminist ideologies, community struggles, and sociopolitical consciousness—as tools to disrupt oppressive narratives. Similarly, Player (2021, 2022) designed afterschool spaces where girls of Color utilized multimodal practices (writing, art, dialogue) to critique societal norms, craft self-celebratory narratives, and forge solidarity through shared vulnerabilities and joys. Collectively, these studies argue for structural educational approaches that actively challenge intersecting oppressions while valuing the cultural and racial identities of TSCs.

Interrogating racialization at the intersection of religion. Two studies investigated how Muslim TSCs experienced racialization and Islamophobia in post-9/11 U.S. contexts (Cun, 2021; Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Cun (2021) highlighted how dominant discourses racialized the religious identity of Burmese Muslim youth as “terrorist.” This produced a “color-blind anti-Muslim racial discourse” that permeates schools, framing biases in seemingly neutral terms while perpetuating systemic marginalization. Similarly, Deroo and Mohamud (2022) explored the erasure of a transnational Muslim female student’s identity

from school curricula alongside overt Islamophobia. However, they also emphasized the empowering role of social media as a crucial space for identity affirmation and resistance. Together, these studies underscore the necessity for educational frameworks that actively dismantle Islamophobia, fostering environments where Muslim TSCs can leverage critical literacy for self-representation.

4.3.3. Questioned Educational Systems

Characterizations of race and racialization operated in certain instances as a means of questioning the educational systems governing learning, and in which TSCs' literacies were encapsulated across contexts. In this process, structural representations of race appeared to function as central elements of the studies, even as ideological representations were acknowledged.

Resisting the adverse impacts of mainstream normative literacies. Thirteen studies within this corpus highlighted how U.S.-dominant, normative literacy practices—rooted in standardized testing, English-only mandates, and colonial power hierarchies—deliver “inauthentic and simulated literacy instruction” (Cuero, 2010). These practices systemically devalue TSCs' bilingual and transnational identities, positioning them as “other” or academically deficient (de la Piedra, 2010) and creating conflict with home-based literacy engagements (Quast & Taira, 2021). Furthermore, research challenged school norms that privilege white, middle-class behaviors, critiquing how teachers often label TSCs as deviant or disengaged when they fail to conform to Eurocentric classroom expectations, such as maintaining direct eye contact or remaining stationary (Souto-Manning et al., 2016). Consequently, these scholars advocate for decolonizing literacy education by centering TSCs' voices, talents, and cultural identities (O. García, 2023; Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012; Choi et al., 2014; Curdt-Christiansen & La Morgia, 2018; de los Ríos, 2018, 2022a; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007).

Specifically, Nuñez (2021a, 2021b, 2022) and Nuñez and Urrieta (2021) examined how transfrontier bilingual children navigated English-dominant U.S. schools while maintaining ties to their Spanish-speaking, working-class communities. Through the lenses of “literacies of surveillance” and “critical embodied literacy,” Nuñez critiqued how English-only schooling perpetuates raciolinguistic ideologies that pathologize Latinx language practices, persistently devaluing translanguaging despite its demonstration of high cognitive and social competence.

Similarly, de la Piedra (2010) emphasized that the vernacular, bilingual literacy practices of Mexican TSCs are marginalized within mainstream schools, reflecting deep institutional biases against the racialized Mexican immigrant community represented in the study. Urban schools consistently fail to recognize the super-diversity and intersectional oppressions facing TSCs (Cuero, 2010; Park, 2013). This marginalization is compounded by interactions with mainstream teachers; Somé-Guiébré (2016) found that interaction and access to academic content often depended heavily on English proficiency, resulting in unequal educational exposure. Emphasizing that normative literacy discourses are culturally situated in whiteness, these studies call for an expanded view of literacy. In response to this exclusion, TSCs frequently construct a “third space” (Gutiérrez, 2008; Soja, 1996) that blends their full linguistic and transnational repertoires to resist assimilation and racial discrimination (de la Piedra, 2010; Quast & Taira, 2021).

Arresting the school-based devaluation of TSCs' literacies. Research consistently revealed that TSCs bring valuable cultural practices to schools, yet these practices are routinely overlooked or undervalued in dominant educational settings (Cun, 2021; Daniel, 2019; de la Piedra, 2010; Deroo & Mohamud, 2022; Endo, 2016; Linares, 2022; Sanchez, 2009). This invisibility (Bryce-Laporte, 1972) reflects an educational system that ignores

the sociocultural contexts of literacy, preventing TSCs' lived experiences from scaffolding academic engagement.

Eight studies actively critiqued deficit-oriented practices that misrepresent TSC literacy skills. For instance, an overemphasis on testing in urban schools effectively excludes transnational knowledge and storytelling traditions from formal curricula, reducing TSCs' meaningful academic participation (Cuero, 2010; Linares, 2022). Furthermore, program models frequently erase TSCs' complex backgrounds, reinforcing homogenized labels such as "Hispanic" or "Latina/o/x" (Linares, 2022). This erasure critically limits a school's capacity to leverage cultural capital, prompting urgent calls for transformative approaches that validate transnational identities as essential components of equitable education.

Naming school space as racially segregated, hostile, class divided. Eleven studies critiqued U.S. K-12 schools as racially hostile environments for TSCs, despite their immense ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Researchers argued that U.S. schools reinforce resegregated, colonial structures that privilege whiteness and English monolingualism (Bruna, 2007; Kennedy et al., 2019), impose "a single system of thought" that fosters internalized oppression (de los Ríos, 2020), and perpetuate everyday racism (C. C. Lee et al., 2021; Park, 2013; Ramos-Salazar et al., 2023; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007; Thakurta, 2021).

Studies focusing on Asian TSCs (Choi et al., 2014; Endo, 2016; Son, 2022) highlighted how the model-minority stereotype associates these students with intelligence but social withdrawal. Consequently, teachers and peers offer less support, erroneously perceiving English-fluent Asian TSCs as "more Americanized." However, regardless of English proficiency, Asian TSCs frequently faced exclusion and stereotyping tied to their racial backgrounds, leading to intense isolation in predominantly white settings (Son, 2022). Similarly, C. C. Lee et al. (2021) detailed the everyday racism experienced by the Latinx immigrant youth—such as enduring ethnic slurs in class. Yet, despite these hostile environments, Latinx students utilized writing to pursue social and political advocacy. Collectively, these studies name school spaces as sites of hostility and actively call for practices that challenge systemic segregation.

4.3.4. Geographically Oriented Avenues

Characterizations of race and racialization also operated as a function of geography, complicating variations in nation-based representations of race as a basis for TSCs' literacies. In this process, ideological and structural representations of race were equally addressed.

Recognizing the adverse effects of racialization in the global context. Three studies in this cohort indicate that dominant educational institutions globally uphold mainstream literacy practices as the standard, systematically marginalizing the linguistic and cultural assets of racially and linguistically minoritized transnational communities. For example, Hsin's (2017) study of Vietnamese immigrant families in Taiwan revealed how heritage language practices are pressured to conform to Taiwanese linguistic norms. Similarly, Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia (2018) demonstrated how dominant language ideologies in Southern England marginalize the cultural languages of Chinese, Italian, and Pakistani immigrant families.

Beyond the superior positioning of named languages, TSCs face significant racialization in their host countries. Bruinenberg et al. (2021) examined how TSCs from diverse racial backgrounds (e.g., Eritrean, Moroccan, Turkish, Kurdish) experienced racialized treatment in the Netherlands, which deeply shaped their media engagement. In response, these students turned to social media as a form of cultural resistance. For instance, a participant named Riem used digital platforms to affirm her Syrian identity and challenge negative stereotypes, highlighting how TSCs ideologically counter discrimination in their host societies.

5. Discussion

In this review, we set out to identify how conceptions of literacies surrounding transnational students of Color (TSCs) have been reflected in the literature over the past 24 years. Specifically, we examined how characterizations of race and racialization, operationalized through an intersectionally informed Critical Race Theory (CRT), work ideologically and structurally to legitimize or delegitimize TSCs' literacies. Ultimately, our goal was to determine how these conceptualizations can inform racially just educational research, serving as a foundation for equity and the flourishing of TSCs.

Across the literature, we observed concerted efforts to acknowledge the "holistic literacies" of TSCs. Studies legitimized these literacies as fully entangled (P. Smith et al., 2026) with students' personhoods, requiring the autonomy to leverage their literate practices for both self-legitimization and broader goals like "social change" (Freire, 2004). Beyond this, a majority of the studies conceived literacy ideologically, foregrounding "translocality," "transmodality," and "translinguistics." This allowed researchers to examine how transforming traditional educational pathways, addressing intersectionalities, and emphasizing cross-border geographical orientations serve as mechanisms to combat the impacts of racialization on TSCs' lives. Studies focused on translingual and translanguaging orientations, for example, highlighted the collapse of rigid demarcations between named languages, boundaries originally constructed by colonial hierarchies. These studies demonstrated how students' literacies, regardless of whether they are framed ideologically or autonomously, function as vital assets for flourishing (P. Smith, 2024; Keyes, 2002) when decoupled from the "White Gaze" (Yancy, 2005).

Conversely, studies, particularly some focused on "biliteracy," examined TSCs' named languages primarily as tools for cognitive development, proficiency, and academic achievement. These studies appeared heavily focused on the structural "outcomes" (Suárez-Orozco, 2017) of TSCs' literacies, aligning with the race-based, Eurocentric expectations of school systems. Consequently, they placed less emphasis on how structural mechanisms influence the ideological dimensions of TSCs' literacies. By privileging literacies as measurable school products, these studies reflect how dominant educational discourses often frame TSCs through deficit-oriented, outcome-driven lenses, thereby obscuring their critical and sociocultural dimensions.

Notwithstanding the above, a few pivotal studies recognized the value of synthesizing conceptions of literacy across autonomous and ideological pathways to legitimize TSCs' holistic literacies (e.g., P. Smith et al., 2019, 2022). These studies illustrated how TSCs constantly construct and leverage their literacies often required by Eurocentric norms based on self-determination and family needs. By focusing equally on the structural and ideological notions of literacies, and their corresponding representations of race, these studies clarified the need to foreground both elements simultaneously. Acknowledging the power dynamics between TSCs and their schools, curricula, and societies makes it possible to reconcile autonomous and ideological approaches to literacy. It reveals that literacies frequently operate based on ideological assumptions that drive autonomous ascriptions, while autonomous models can also be generated from the ideological contexts encapsulating them. Explicitly examining race and racialization allows these two approaches to be reconciled while honoring the need for students' flourishing (P. Smith, 2024).

Based on these findings, we propose three major ramifications necessary for reorienting future research on the literacies of TSCs.

A Reorientation from Literacy to Literacies. Our findings suggest that race and racialization, understood through an intersectionally informed CRT framework, offer important lenses for examining how TSCs' literacy practices are shaped by broader histories of migration, colonialism, and unequal relations of power. Such a perspective draws attention

to how schools may simultaneously recognize cultural and linguistic diversity while continuing to privilege dominant expectations of language, belonging, and assimilation, a tension illustrated in Warrican's (2020) discussion of moral licensing. These dynamics are particularly visible in studies informed by critical language, translingual, and translanguaging perspectives, which challenge hierarchical assumptions that position particular named languages and standardized varieties as inherently more legitimate than others (Alim, 2004; Alim et al., 2016; O. García & Li, 2014; P. Smith, 2020). Rather than treating students' multilingual practices as interference, deficiency, or incomplete acquisition of a dominant language, these perspectives recognize how TSCs draw strategically on their full linguistic, cultural, and semiotic repertoires across schools, homes, communities, and transnational spaces. In this sense, moving from a singular notion of *literacy* toward plural *literacies* is more than a terminological shift. It broadens what counts as legitimate literacy practice, makes visible forms of knowledge and meaning-making that may otherwise be marginalized in school-based measures of literacy, and provides a stronger conceptual basis for examining how TSCs negotiate racialization while exercising linguistic, cultural, and literate agency.

A Reorientation from Individual to Structural Understandings. Our findings point to the need to move from individual explanations of TSCs' literacy experiences toward a more structural understanding of how literacy is organized, valued, and regulated within educational institutions. Across the reviewed studies, race, language, migration, and literacy were often mutually constituted through institutional practices and discourses that reflected enduring colonial and racial hierarchies (Rosa & Flores, 2017; P. Smith et al., 2025). Studies centering Latinx and Black TSCs, for example, demonstrated that students' literacy experiences were shaped not only by their individual skills or linguistic repertoires, but also by broader assumptions about whose knowledge counts, what forms of reading and writing are recognized as legitimate, and which cultural and communicative practices are rewarded in schools. An intersectionally informed CRT perspective is therefore useful for examining how literacy expectations are embedded within racialized structures rather than located primarily within individual students. This orientation extends long-standing calls to foreground structural analyses of race in literacy research (e.g., Harris, 1989; Willis, 2015). Frameworks such as raciolinguistics, transraciolinguistics, and linguistic justice further illuminate one important dimension of this process by showing how language hierarchies can shape access to literacy, curricular recognition, and educational legitimacy (Alim et al., 2016; Baker-Bell, 2020; Chu et al., 2026b; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Sayad, 2004).

The reviewed studies also demonstrated that schools, teachers, curricula, and assessment systems can either reproduce or disrupt these structural inequities. Across Majority World and Minority World contexts, dominant literacy norms frequently privileged standardized, school-sanctioned forms of reading, writing, and knowledge while rendering students' multilingual, familial, community-based, and transnational literacy practices less visible. At the same time, several studies illustrated how institutional practices could create more equitable conditions by expanding what counts as legitimate literacy and by connecting school learning with students' broader cultural and transnational repertoires. From this perspective, future research should move beyond explaining literacy differences through individual student characteristics and examine more directly how institutional policies, curricula, assessment practices, and racialized expectations shape TSCs' access to, participation in, and recognition within literacy learning.

A Reorientation from the Local to the Transnational. Our findings also suggest the need to move beyond locally bounded understandings of TSCs' literacies. Although many studies challenged racialized school practices and sought to legitimize students' home and community literacies, fewer examined how local definitions of literacy are themselves

shaped by transnational histories of colonialism, migration, racial formation, and unequal knowledge circulation. The tension, therefore, is not simply between students' home languages and the language of schooling. It also concerns whose texts, histories, interpretive practices, and ways of producing knowledge become authorized as literacy in educational spaces. Research on the erasure of Majority World knowledges, for example, illustrates how Eurocentric literacy norms can marginalize epistemologies and meaning-making practices that students bring across national and cultural contexts (P. Smith et al., 2025). Scholarship on linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988), linguistic racism (Calvet, 1974), raciolinguistics (Alim et al., 2016; Chu et al., 2026b; Rosa & Flores, 2017), transraciolinguistics, and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020) helps illuminate how language operates within these broader literacy hierarchies. Yet the implications extend beyond language itself to questions of whose literacy practices, cultural knowledge, texts, and interpretive resources are recognized as academically legitimate.

Important gaps also remain in how these transnational structures are examined across racialized groups. Despite the enduring influence of a Black–white racial binary in many Minority World contexts, relatively few studies centered Black transnational students or examined how anti-Blackness structures their literacy experiences across national and institutional contexts. Similarly, only a small subset of studies explicitly examined how Whiteness operates as a broader organizing structure in determining what forms of literacy, knowledge, and cultural expression are normalized or marginalized. Greater attention to these dynamics would allow future research to move beyond documenting differences in literacy practices toward examining how racial power influences the production, circulation, recognition, and valuation of literacies across groups.

At the transnational level, the reviewed literature further demonstrates that TSCs' literacy experiences cannot be separated from migration regimes, racial histories, and state policies that shape educational access and belonging (Guo, 2025). In the United States, for example, immigration policies and racialized histories have influenced not only who is permitted to enter and remain in the nation but also the educational conditions under which immigrant-origin youth encounter literacy, curriculum, and schooling. Gallo and Hornberger (2019) similarly demonstrate how immigration policies can shape children's educational experiences, biliteracy development, and transnational identities. These contemporary conditions are connected to a longer history of racialized exclusion, including restrictions targeting free Black migrants following the Haitian Revolution, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the 1917 literacy test for immigrants, and the 2017 travel ban targeting several Muslim-majority countries. Read together, these histories underscore that literacy is never exclusively a local or classroom-based practice. What counts as legitimate literacy, whose knowledge is recognized, and which literacy resources become available to TSCs are shaped by racial and political processes operating across national borders. A transnational orientation therefore enables literacy research to examine how local educational experiences are connected to broader histories and structures of racialization, migration, and power.

6. Conclusions

Taken together, this review demonstrates that the TSCs' literacies are shaped by intersecting structures of race, language, migration, and other forms of marginalization, calling for sustained efforts by literacy researchers, schools, and educational institutions to broaden what counts as literacy and to recognize, value, and support the diverse literate practices TSCs bring across contexts. These commitments must recognize both the structural racialization of TSCs' literacies and the ways students draw on reading, writing, storytelling, multimodal composition, community knowledge, and other meaning-making practices to position themselves as legitimate knowers and social actors. Simultaneously, these practices

enabled students to sustain relationships, interpret their experiences, construct and circulate knowledge, and participate in their schools, families, and communities. Attending to both structure and agency avoids two reductive tendencies: framing TSCs' literacies primarily as deficits requiring remediation, or romanticizing their literacy practices as inherently resistant or liberatory. Instead, this perspective directs attention to the social, institutional, and transnational conditions that shape which literacy practices are recognized, legitimized, constrained, or afforded educational and social value.

For literacy scholarship, this analysis points to the need for greater precision in naming the populations under study, more sustained attention to race and racialization, and research designs that connect classroom literacy practices with family, community, and cross-border contexts. For schools and other educational institutions, recognizing students' multilingual and multimodal repertoires must extend beyond celebrating diversity to examining how curricula, assessment practices, language policies, and institutional structures authorize some forms of literacies while marginalizing others.

Future research should preserve distinctions among students' migration histories and legal or institutional positioning while also investigating the transnational and racializing structures that operate across these differences. Future critical interpretive synthesis should extend the linguistic and geographic scope of this work by involving multilingual research teams, using validated translation procedures, and searching regional and multilingual databases beyond predominantly English-language indexes. Such methodological extensions could identify scholarship grounded in non-Anglophone and Global South contexts, where racialization, literacy, and related social processes may be conceptualized through different historical and geopolitical frameworks (see [Vigouroux, 2023](#)). Together, these shifts, from singular conceptions of literacy to plural literacies, from individual remediation to institutionally motivated structural analysis, and from exclusively local explanations to a grounding in transnational perspectives, can support more rigorous and equitable understandings of TSCs' literacies and the conditions necessary for their educational participation and flourishing ([P. Smith, 2024](#)).

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/educsci16101598/s1>, Supplementary File S1: Analysis of Characterizations of Race and Racialization; Supplementary File S2: Summary of Empirical Studies; Supplementary File S3: PRISMA 2020 Checklist; Supplementary File S4: ENTREQ Checklist; Supplementary File S5: CASP Appraisal; Supplementary File S6: Evidence Base.

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Notes

- ¹ These estimates describe distinct demographic populations and provide a broader context for this review; neither serves as the operational definition of TSCs.
- ² These terms were used to maximize retrieval across partially overlapping bodies of scholarship; they were not treated as synonyms or as independently sufficient indicators of transnationality.

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