

ผลของการใช้วรรณคดีในการเรียนการสอนภาษา  
เพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ต่อทักษะการอ่านเพื่อการวิเคราะห์  
และความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรมของผู้เรียนไทย

The Effects of the Use of Literature in Intercultural Language  
Teaching and Learning on Thai students' Critical Reading Skills  
and Cultural Awareness

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### บทคัดย่อ

การอ่านเพื่อการวิเคราะห์และความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรมสำคัญต่อผู้เรียนด้านการศึกษาและความเป็นพลเมืองโลก อนึ่ง ผู้เรียนชาวไทยขาดความสามารถเชิงวิเคราะห์ซึ่งวัดจากผลการศึกษาและมีความเข้าใจด้านวัฒนธรรมอื่น ๆ น้อย งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลของการใช้วรรณคดีภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนการสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ในแง่ทักษะการอ่านเพื่อการวิเคราะห์และความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรมของผู้เรียน กลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือ นักเรียนมัธยมปลายจำนวน 20 คน ใช้เวลาเรียนจำนวน 30 ชั่วโมง โดยอ่านเรื่องสั้นด้านวัฒนธรรมจำนวน 4 เรื่อง เก็บข้อมูลจากการทดสอบการอ่านเชิงวิเคราะห์ การทดสอบแบบก่อนและหลังสอบ และการเขียนบันทึก จากนั้นนำข้อมูลเบื้องต้นมาวิเคราะห์โดยใช้ค่ากลางและกลุ่มข้อสอบตัวอย่างแบบจับคู่ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การใช้วรรณคดีภาษาอังกฤษในการเรียนการสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ช่วยพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านเชิงวิเคราะห์และความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรม อนึ่ง แม้มีข้อจำกัดด้านทักษะภาษาอังกฤษ แต่ผู้เรียนสามารถบ่งชี้และประเมินผลผลิตทางวัฒนธรรม การฝึกฝนและมุมมองต่าง ๆ ผ่านกิจกรรมในห้องเรียน อาทิ การเปรียบเทียบและถกประเด็นในกลุ่ม ดังนั้น ทักษะการอ่านเพื่อการวิเคราะห์และความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรมสามารถสอนและพัฒนาได้ ผ่านกรอบการสอนเพื่อความเข้าใจ การเปรียบเทียบ การประเมินและกิจกรรมเข้ากลุ่ม

**คำสำคัญ:** ทักษะการอ่านเพื่อการวิเคราะห์ ความตระหนักรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรม วรรณคดี การเรียนการสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม

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## Abstract

Critical reading and cultural awareness are crucial for students for academic success and becoming global citizens. However, Thai students have a lack of critical abilities in academic performance and little understanding of other cultures. This research aimed to investigate the effects of the use of literature in Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning (ILTL) on Thai students' critical reading skills and cultural awareness. Twenty Thai high school students studied for 30 hours with four cultural short-stories. The data was collected from critical reading quizzes, pre- and post-tests, journals, and analyzed by mean scores and paired sample test. The results showed that the use of literature in Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning helped to develop critical reading skills and cultural awareness. Through classroom activities such as comparison and group discussions with guided questions, students were able to identify and evaluate cultural products, practices, and perspectives, despite a lack of English skills. Through the recirculating teaching framework sequence of comprehending, comparing, evaluating, and collaborating, critical reading skills and cultural awareness can be taught and improved.

**Keywords:** Critical reading skills, Cultural awareness, Literature, Intercultural language teaching and learning

## Background/Introduction

Living in a global age, critical reading skills, and cultural awareness are crucial for students to be active learners and become global citizens. According to Rajabi and Tabatabaee (2015, p. 76), current teaching and learning of English is tending to emphasize the development of students' critical reading based on critical thinking skills.

In the process of becoming international citizens, students should also be aware of cultural differences and similarities. Byram (1997, p. 101) defines critical cultural awareness as the ability to critically evaluate one's own and other's cultural values, attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors. Fungchomchoei and Kardkarnklai (2016, p. 241) noted that the Thai Ministry of Education in 2008, stressed the importance of developing Thai students' abilities to understand the relationship between language and culture and to use language in real-life situations. Despite this encouragement, Thai students' low critical performance and lack of cultural awareness remain a problem. Ploysangwal (2018, p. 78), claims that in 2012 the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

revealed that Thai students' academic performance in critical thinking and literacy in math, reading, and science was behind that of their neighboring countries. Only 1% of students achieved level 5 and 6 (higher-order cognitive processes) in the PISA reading test.

The lack of Thai students' critical thinking skills may be due to the conservative Thai culture and the traditional teacher-centered education system (Kaowiwattanakul, 2012 as cited in Boa, 2018, p. 82 ), which can also lead to problems in developing cultural awareness. Denduang, Rodhetbha, and Keeratiburana (2016, p. 68) found that Thai students have low cultural awareness due to the ineffective Thai education system. Their study found that Thai undergraduate students lack an understanding of other cultures, including neighboring ASEAN countries, of which they have only superficial knowledge.

In this regard, using literature is suggested as an appropriate medium for enhancing the development of students' critical reading skills and cultural awareness. Tung and Chang (2009, p. 291) agree that reading literature requires higher mental processes including critical thinking, interpretation, and evaluation of a text. Through literature, students can be exposed to a new world and have opportunities for reassembling and rethinking of their ideas. Thus, the use of literature in ILTL in the Thai English classroom might be an effective teaching methodology in developing Thai students' critical reading and critical cultural awareness.

### Research Objectives (RO)

1. To investigate the effects of the use of literature in intercultural language teaching and learning on Thai students' critical reading skills.
2. To investigate the effects of the use of literature in intercultural language teaching and learning on Thai students' critical cultural awareness.

### Conceptual Framework

This study integrated the literature reading framework of Stern (1991, p. 332) (questioning, inferencing, evaluating, and reflecting) and ILTL framework of Liddicoat (2011, p. 841) (noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting), combined as follows: 1) questioning, noticing and inferencing, 2) comparing, 3) evaluating, and 4) reflecting and interacting. This researcher then reformed this framework as 1) comprehending, 2) comparing, 3) evaluating, and 4) collaborating, in a continuous recirculating sequence.

## Methodology

### Subjects of the study

The study participants were 20 ‘Pre-Intermediate’ Thai high school students in Mathayom 5 at a Thai private school in Chiang Mai, specializing in English and Chinese. All of them are Thai and have been learning English and Chinese, but with very little opportunity to be exposed to other cultures.

### Research Instruments

#### 1. Lesson Plans

Four lesson plans were used to develop students’ critical reading skills and cultural awareness, applied to each of the cultural short stories, following the teaching conceptual framework: 1) comprehending, 2) comparing, 3) evaluating, and 4) collaborating. The study used four short stories from a previous study from Çandirli (2018, p. 51), listed below:

- *The Circuit* by Francisco Jiménez (1997): A Mexican migrant family who came illegally to California in America.
- *They Don’t Mean It* by Lensey Namioka (2004): A Chinese Immigrant family’s story of tradition and cultural values.
- *Shame* by Dick Gregory (1964): An African American boy’s life of discrimination and poverty.
- *So what Are You, Anyway?* By Lawrence Hill (1992): A mixed-race teenage girl’s experience of racism.

The reason for selecting these stories as teaching material was that they are real-life accounts by authors from different cultures which contained a variety of cultural dimensions including family situations, lifestyles, traditions, and cultural values. Adam and Harper (2016, p. 6) suggest that teachers use literature that portrays the values of minority cultures, justices, and various perceptions of people toward the world so that students might be able to learn tolerance and empathy toward others and to cope with stereotypes and bias. In this regard, the study selected the above short-stories.

#### 2. Pre- and Post-Test.

Pre- and post-tests were used to evaluate students’ critical reading skills and cultural awareness. They consisted of three sections of critical reading skills (access and retrieve, interpret and integrate, evaluate and reflect) and cultural awareness (identify

cultural facts, evaluate and reflect). The test included multiple-choice, open-ended questions, and short paragraph writing. Pre-test administered at the beginning of the course and post-test at the end.

### 3. Critical Reading Comprehension Quizzes

Students were given two critical reading comprehension quizzes at the end of each two short story lessons to assess students' critical reading progress. The quiz tested three aspects of critical reading skills: access and retrieve, interpret and integrate, evaluate and reflect.

### 4. Journals

Cultural journals were assigned after the completion of the second and fourth short stories to measure students' cultural awareness. They wrote about their perception of cultural practices, products, and perspectives and expressed their opinions and judgments about the story.

### 5. Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

Index-of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) with three experts evaluated the validity of research instruments. Tests reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha. Intra-rater reliability applied to the test and journal rubrics.

## Results and Discussion

The study findings and discussion are presented in two parts, corresponding to the Research Objectives (RO)

**Part 1:** RO1 investigated the effects of the use of literature in ILTL on Thai students' critical reading skills.

Students' Critical Reading (CR) skills were evaluated by two critical reading comprehension quizzes and pre- and post-tests. Two critical reading comprehension test results with overall mean scores are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Overall Mean Scores of Critical Reading Comprehension Quizzes

	Participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (%)	SD
CR Quiz 1	20	8.00	88.00	<b>24.90</b>	19.05
CR Quiz 2	20	16.00	96.00	<b>40.10</b>	25.99

Data results reveal that quiz 2 mean score ( $\bar{X}=40.10$ ) is significantly higher than quiz 1 ( $\bar{X}=24.90$ ), indicating that students' critical reading skills improved through the

treatments. Table 2 below breaks down the overall mean scores into three aspects of critical reading skills results.

**Table 2** Three Aspects of Critical Reading Skills Mean Scores

	Participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Q1 Access & retrieve	20	4.0	10	<b>7.9</b>	2.29
Q2 Access & retrieve	20	4.0	10	<b>8.0</b>	1.12
Q1 Interpret & integrate	20	0.0	19	<b>2.45</b>	4.72
Q2 Interpret & integrate	20	0.0	20	<b>7.45</b>	6.09
Q1 Evaluate & reflect	20	0.0	19	<b>2.10</b>	4.49
Q2 Evaluate & reflect	20	0.0	20	<b>4.60</b>	7.02

The results show that Q2 access and retrieve mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =8.0 out of 10) is slightly higher than Q1 ( $\bar{X}$ = 7.9). Q2 interpret and integrate mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =7.45 out of 20) is significantly higher than Q1 ( $\bar{X}$ =2.45). Q2 evaluate and reflect mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =4.60 out of 20) is also significantly higher than Q1 ( $\bar{X}$ =2.10).

The result from the pre- and post-test of critical reading skills are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** Pre- and Post-Tests Mean Scores of CR

	Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Pre-test CR</b>	20	<b>13.60</b>	6.25	-3.880	.001
<b>Post-test CR</b>	20	<b>20.75</b>	9.68		

Data results reveal that the post-test critical reading mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =20.75 out of 38) is higher than the pre-test mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =13.60). The paired sample t-test result shows that the difference is statistically significant. The ‘t’ value ( $t$ = -3.880,  $p$ < 0.05) indicates that the post-test mean score is higher than the pre-test. The data in Tables 1, 2, and 3 indicate that students’ critical reading skills improved following the treatments.

**Part 2:** RO2 investigated the effects of the use of literature in ILTL on Thai students’ Cultural Awareness (CA). CA was evaluated through two student cultural journals based on assigned short stories and pre- and post-tests.

The mean scores of cultural journals are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4** Cultural Journal Mean Scores

	Participants	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (%)	SD
<b>Journal 1</b>	20	8.00	60.00	<b>27.60</b>	14.50
<b>Journal 2</b>	20	20.00	64.00	<b>28.80</b>	13.58

The analysis reveals that the J2 mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =28.80) is slightly higher than the J1 ( $\bar{X}$ =27.60). The majority received a somewhat higher score for J2 than J1.

The results of pre- and post-tests CA are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5** Pre- and Post-Test of CA

	Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Pre-test (CA)</b>	20	<b>6.50</b>	3.94	<b>- 2.435</b>	.025
<b>Post-test (CA)</b>	20	<b>8.15</b>	4.27		

Data results reveal that the post-test CA mean score ( $\bar{X}$ =8.15 out of 24) is higher than the pre-test CA ( $\bar{X}$ =6.50). The paired sample t-test result shows that the difference is statistically significant. The 't' value ( $t=-2.435$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) indicates that the post-test CA mean score is higher than the pre-test. It reveals that students' cultural awareness skills improved through the treatments.

## Discussion

According to the results, the use of literature in ILTL can positively affect Thai students' critical reading skills and cultural awareness. Particularly their interpretation and integration of the story as well as evaluation and reflection skills were significantly improved. Through the treatments, the students learned and applied how to interpret and integrate the story and provide an evaluation with reasons in a simple way.

Despite the improvement of critical reading and cultural awareness, the mean scores were still low, mainly due to low English proficiency. Noom-ura (2013, p. 139) claims that while Thai students study English for 12 years, their English proficiency remains at a low point. During this research period, the students were given the CEFR test, showing that most students were only at English basic user levels A1 and A2.

Tung and Chang (2009, p. 306) also state that students' critical abilities are influenced by their learning habits and environment. The participants had studied English in a traditional teacher-centered learning environment with little opportunity to use

English. As a result, students had difficulty with reading, writing journals, discussing, evaluating, and reflecting on English short stories.

In their journals, students received low scores because most of them faced difficulty in identifying cultural perspectives rather than identifying cultural practices and products. Cultural products and practices tend to be easier to identify than perspectives (Frank Jerrold, 2013, p.3). Nevertheless, the results indicated that students developed some understanding of what cultural products, practices, and perspectives are, and were able to compare and evaluate cultural differences and similarities between cultures. Developing cultural awareness requires more time and effort. The research results indicate that through practice (comprehending, comparing, evaluating, reflecting) and discussion, students could develop critical reading skills and cultural awareness.

The use of literature in the form of short stories can be an effective and useful means to develop students' critical abilities. Zerrin Eren (2004, p. 46) conducted a similar study to develop cultural awareness by using short-stories at a public school in Turkey, with a wide range of English proficiency and time constraints. The results showed an improvement in their language and cultural comprehension skills.

Finally, comparison through guided classroom discussions can be an effective classroom activity. It can help students in developing critical reading skills and cultural awareness through comparing and contrasting cultural similarities and differences as well as identifying and evaluating the cultural facts. Tung and Shu-Ying Chan (2009, p. 298) claim that many students in their study agreed that “guided-in class discussion” helped them develop critical thinking skills.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

These results reveal that the use of literature in ILTL can develop Thai students' critical reading and cultural awareness. This methodology provided students with opportunities to study different cultural aspects and to develop critical reading skills. This research confirms that critical reading and cultural awareness can be taught and improved. This study suggests that Thai English teachers should use English rather than Thai for communication and provide more communicative activities such as questioning, group discussions, group tasks, and/or presentations are necessary.

The 30 hours of teaching critical reading and cultural awareness in this study shows that building critical abilities requires time and effort, and both students and teachers need to be motivated to accept new teaching and learning methodologies.



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