Promoting Intercultural Competence through Different Versions of Cinderella Stories for Thai High School Students

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Article information	Abstract
	This study investigates the effect of integrating different versions of Cinderella in a regular English classroom for Thai grade 10 students to enhance students' intercultural competence (IC), employing Deardorff's (2009) and Byram's (1997, 2021) model as the theoretical frameworks. A mixed-methods research approach was used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data, assessing the impact of implementing Cinderella stories on learners' intercultural competence. Various research instruments, including versions of Cinderella stories, designed lesson plans, an intercultural competence assessment questionnaire, and students' reflective writing, were employed. The findings indicated a significant improvement across all IC dimensions, with the most notable enhancement observed in cultural knowledge. Additionally, students demonstrated increased sensitivity to social discrimination, developed positive attitudes towards cultural differences, and improved intercultural communication skills. Reflective writing was crucial for fostering more profound understanding, self-awareness, and empathy. The study underscores the effectiveness of multicultural narratives and reflective practices in cultivating students' appreciation of cultural diversity and highlights the importance of student-centred activities in developing intercultural competence. Teachers are encouraged to adopt these strategies to create a more culturally aware and empathetic learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence (IC) is crucial in English language learning for several reasons. First, it involves tolerating, respecting, understanding, and accepting cultural differences, which is essential for preparing students to enter the workforce (Pllana, 2021). This competence is necessary for personal development and professional success, as it enhances the ability to navigate and thrive in diverse environments. Also, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is integral to developing critical thinking skills, which are essential in language teaching and learning. This competence allows students to engage more deeply with the language and

its cultural nuances, leading to a more holistic understanding and effective communication. Finally, the increasing demand for interculturally competent graduates and employees underscores the need to integrate IC into educational frameworks. This competence cuts across disciplines and contexts, making it a vital skill for the 21st century (Deardorff, 2015). Embedding IC in educational curricula ensures that students are better prepared to meet the challenges of a diverse and interconnected world.

Students need language skills, grammar proficiency, and the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Byram, 2021; Byram et al., 2002). Thailand's national policy recognises the benefits of integrating cultural exploration into English language teaching. This is evident in the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) introduced in 2001 and recently revised in 2023 (Ministry of Education, 2023). The BEC emphasises that learning English can help communicate effectively, share knowledge, and understand different perspectives. However, teaching culture in Thailand, where this study was conducted, is always about teaching native culture, such as British or American culture (Ministry of Education, 2023). By only exposing native culture, it is not enough to prepare learners for the 21st century. When learners learn only native culture, they may have a bias against other cultures. They may not be open-minded, or they may not respect other cultures.

As a result, it is essential to promote IC among students. Promoting IC, particularly in the EFL context, involves various strategies and approaches tailored to different educational contexts. A well-structured, culturally embedded curriculum can improve young students' L2 motivation, ICC, and English proficiency (Lee et al., 2023; Tananuraksakul & Soontornwipat, 2021). Moreover, culturally rich and engaging material can promote cognitive skills and affective aspects such as songs (e.g., Rajani Na Ayuthaya, 2018) or short stories (e.g., Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020). Additionally, Zhang and Zhou (2019) reviewed relevant intervention studies to promote IC published from 2000 until 2018, revealing four sub-types of pedagogical intervention: culture-based teaching materials, classroom activities, teaching strategies, and integrated intercultural programs. In Thailand, there is a growing interest in developing an intervention to promote intercultural competence (Phongsirikul & Thongrin, 2019; Rajani Na Ayuthaya, 2018; Worawong et al., 2017). In these studies, the participants were mostly undergraduate students, and there are just a few studies at the elementary and secondary levels (e.g., Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to conduct more research with different groups.

Situated in the research lines of cultural-based teaching materials and classroom activities to promote IC (Zhang & Zhou, 2019), short stories play a significant role among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Feeney and Gajaseni (2020) found that reading and discussing short stories helped develop students' ICC, particularly in the aspect of interpreting and identifying abilities of native cultures. Moreover, engaging students with multicultural literary short stories through the concept of commonalities shows students' critical intercultural skills, reading skills, and language input (Cantizano, 2020; Gómez Rodríguez, 2014). This study builds on using short stories to develop IC among EFL students. It aims to explore how culturally diverse Cinderella stories, combined with designed classroom activities, can enhance IC among Thai secondary students. Previous research has demonstrated that engaging students with multicultural literary short stories and reflective writing fosters critical intercultural skills, deepens cultural

understanding, and improves language proficiency (Bagui & Adder, 2020; Barrett, 2018). By focusing on different cultural versions of the Cinderella narrative, this study aims to assess their impact on students' intercultural understanding, attitudes, and behaviours. These stories' shared yet culturally distinct elements make them particularly suitable for promoting deeper intercultural awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural competence frameworks

Two prominent models have shaped the discourse on fostering IC: Deardorff's (2009) ICC model and Byram's model (Byram, 1997, 2009, 2021). These frameworks were used in this study to provide comprehensive perspectives on the multifaceted nature of IC, offering insights into its components, application, and significance within educational contexts.

According to Deardorff (2009), the IC model emphasises the interconnectedness of attitudes, knowledge, and skills as foundational components for effective intercultural communication and behaviour. Positive attitudes, such as respect, openness, and curiosity, are essential for fostering a receptive mindset towards cultural differences. Knowledge, including cultural self-awareness, culture-specific understanding, and global awareness, provides the intellectual framework for navigating diverse cultural contexts. Finally, active listening, observation, analysis, and critical thinking are crucial for applying knowledge and attitudes in practical intercultural interactions (Bennett, 2009; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2009).

Byram's Model (1997, 2021) recognises the importance of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Byram introduces the concept of foundational values as critical for IC. His model expands on Deardorff's by categorising these elements into five key components: intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Byram's approach suggests that these components work together to foster IC. Still, he strongly emphasises critical cultural awareness, which involves a reflective understanding of one's own and others' cultures. This reflective dimension distinguishes Byram's model, underscoring the importance of understanding cultural differences and critically evaluating them to engage in intercultural dialogue ethically and effectively (Byram, 2021).

Both models share a common foundation, recognising the necessity of positive attitudes, knowledge, and skills for developing IC. However, Deardorff's model focuses on the dynamic interplay between these elements, highlighting how they collectively contribute to intercultural effectiveness. In contrast, Byram's model adds complexity by incorporating foundational values, particularly critical cultural awareness, emphasising a more analytical and evaluative approach to intercultural engagement. This distinction reflects Byram's focus on education and ethical responsibility in intercultural encounters, whereas Deardorff's model is more pragmatic, centring on the practical application of intercultural skills and knowledge.

Cinderella stories

The story of Cinderella has captivated generations across different cultures worldwide, with notable versions authored by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. French writer Charles Perrault created one of the most renowned adaptations of this timeless fairy tale. His version, published in 1697 as part of the collection "*Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités*" ("*Stories or tales of times past, with morals*"), introduced key elements that have become central to the Cinderella narrative. The Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, also contributed significantly to Cinderella lore with their version, "*Aschenputtel*," featured in their "Grimm's fairy tales" collection, published in 1812. This version, commonly known as the Grimm Brothers' Cinderella, has distinct characteristics that set it apart from other adaptations.

In this study, seven Cinderella stories were selected: Cinderella's Disney-adapted version, the Brothers Grimm's version and the various Asian, Cuban, African, Egyptian and Persian versions. *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella* (Reinhart Coburn, 2014) is about a hard-working farmer family with a kind and beautiful daughter named Jouanah. The family acquires a cow that is the farmer's transformed wife and helps the farm prosper. However, the farmer betrays his wife by not restoring her to human form and marrying another woman who mistreats Jouanah. Jouanah's mother, in the form of a cow, is sacrificed due to the stepmother's manipulation. After a series of events, Jouanah meets a wealthy and wise man named Shee-Nang, and they fall in love. They eventually left the cruel stepmother and stepsister behind. The story ends with the spirit of Jouanah's mother remaining with her to protect her always.

Adelaida: A Cuban Cinderella (Monnar, 2008) is a story about Adelaida and Marisol, twin sisters with different personalities. Adelaida is kind and generous, while Marisol is selfish. When their father invites them to dinner at his mansion, Adelaida's wife cannot attend due to illness, so Marisol goes instead. However, as events unfold, it becomes clear that Adelaida's selfless nature and good deeds win the admiration of others, including Dr. Perez, who falls in love with her. A magical nurse grants Adelaida the power to speak blessings while warning Marisol that speaking will bring bad things. In the end, Adelaida marries Dr. Perez, and they live happily after taking care of their mother.

The story "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale" (Steptoe, 1988) is set in a small African village and revolves around two sisters, Manyara and Nyasha, and their father, Mufaro. Manyara is envious of Nyasha's kindness and beauty and dreams of becoming a queen. Both sisters set off for the city when the king announces that he will choose the most worthy and beautiful daughter to become queen. Manyara encounters trials on her journey and fails to show kindness, while Nyasha helps those in need. Ultimately, Nyasha's kind and generous nature leads her to be chosen as the queen.

The Egyptian Cinderella (Climo, 1992) tells the story of Rhodopis, a Greek maiden kidnapped by pirates and sold into slavery in Egypt. She was different from other servant girls, with golden curls and green eyes. Although being mistreated, Rhodopis found comfort in animals and dancing. Her kind master gifted her rose-red golden slippers, but one was taken by a falcon,

believed to be the god Horus, and dropped in the Pharaoh's lap. The Pharaoh sought the slipper's owner, found Rhodopis, and, despite objections, declared her his queen, recognising her as genuinely Egyptian.

The Persian Cinderella (Climo, 2001) tells the story of Settareh, a kind but lonely maiden in ancient Persia, mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters. Given a gold coin to buy clothes for the Persian New Year, Settareh buys food for an old woman and a blue jug containing a magical pari (fairy). The pari grants her wishes, and on the prince's New Year celebration, Settareh becomes a beauty but loses a diamond anklet. Prince Mehrdad finds it and falls in love with her. However, jealous stepsisters turn her into a turtledove. The prince restores her by removing pins from the bird, and they marry while the stepsisters meet their demise.

Regardless of variations in plotlines, characters, settings, and elements among these Cinderella adaptations, the narrative consistently conveys a few common themes. Generally, the protagonist is a young girl who has lost her mother and faces mistreatment from her stepfamily. However, a magical element intervenes, and she encounters a noble figure with whom she falls in love at a festival or gathering. Throughout selected adaptations, Asian, Cuban, African, Persian, and Egyptian Cinderella emerges as a figure of physical beauty, kind-heartedness, and resilience, embodying timeless virtues. A crucial moment in the plot involves establishing the heroine's identity through a lost item, ultimately leading to her reward: marriage to a noble person for her kindness and virtue. The message of Cinderella remains potent despite time, teaching us to overcome adversity and highlighting the transformative power of goodness.

The study focuses on Cinderella stories because of their universal appeal for character development among students (Latifatul Isro'iyah & Dwi Ima Herminingsih, 2023), the teachable intercultural aspects, and their function as a cultural touchstone that fosters a sense of community. These stories are valuable teaching tools, providing opportunities for cross-cultural exploration and critical analysis in educational settings. Implementing explicit instruction, such as role-playing activities and non-verbal communication, can facilitate students' intercultural interactions (Damnet, 2008; Worawong et al., 2017). Class activities may involve comparing adaptations from different cultures, creating stories in various cultural settings, and discussing underlying themes and moral lessons (Snodin, 2016).

Reflective writing as a tool to promote IC

Reflective writing is crucial in fostering IC, an increasingly vital skill in our globalised world. Studies discussed provide valuable insights into how reflective practices can enhance students' intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and awareness. Integrating reflective practices such as noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting within an EFL context enables students to actively engage with and process their intercultural experiences, leading to a deeper understanding and greater sensitivity to cultural differences (Xiao-mei, 2019). Additionally, reflective writing fosters empathy and an awareness of cultural biases while encouraging critical examination of essentialist views (Zhou & Pilcher, 2018). Moreover, reflective writing helps individuals recognise the importance of IC and facilitates personal and professional growth. By engaging in reflective writing, learners can track their progress and identify areas

for improvement, making it a powerful tool for ongoing development in intercultural contexts (Hagar, 2018; Nardon, 2019). Reflective writing is also a practical assessment method for measuring students' growth in this area (Wong & Blissett, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Guided by the mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2013), the study collected the quantitative data (IC questionnaire) and extracted qualitative data (reflective writing and students' assignments) to explain the quantitative results. This study took place at a public secondary school in central Thailand, involving 21 students from Grade 10 (Mattayomsuksa 4), who were purposefully selected based on specific criteria. These criteria included the requirement for small class sizes, which aligned with the group-oriented nature of the study, as well as a minimum of nine years of exposure to English language learning, with both Thai and English being used as instructional mediums. The study aimed to explore how using different versions of Cinderella stories combined with designed activities promoted students' IC development. The research instruments included a course syllabus, 20-period designed lesson plans (7 lessons), a questionnaire to measure students' IC, reflective paper writing, and students' assignments.

Data collection

The data for this study were collected in three phases: before, during, and after the instructional period. Each phase of data collection is detailed below.

Before the implementation

In the initial phase, students completed a questionnaire to assess their IC level before implementing an intervention. The questionnaire, adapted from Fantini and Tirmizi (2006), was used to measure the IC construct (knowledge, attitude, perceived skills, and awareness). The questionnaire was five Likert's scale with 41 items, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The questionnaire provided the pre-IC data as a baseline to compare the effects of using Cinderella stories to promote students' IC.

During the implementation

Data collection during the implementation phase involved multiple methods, including 20 designed lesson plans and students' reflective writings. The researcher designed lesson plans for seven lessons, spanning 20 periods. Throughout each lesson, we collected empirical data from various classroom assignments. However, for this paper, we focused only on students' reflective writing. These assignments provided insight into students' understanding of IC at different stages of the activities (e.g., mind mapping, Q&A sessions, discussion boards, "walk in their shoes" exercises, learning centres, group brainstorming, interview tasks, class discussions, and summaries) (see Appendix A for details).

Students wrote reflective papers at the end of each lesson, resulting in seven reflections. As a final activity, students collaborated on a group project to create their version of Cinderella stories, with periodic progress presentations. After completing the seven assignments, students wrote a final reflective paper, sharing their perspectives on the Cinderella stories from various cultural angles.

After the Implementation

In the final phase, students retook the questionnaire to assess their IC level, which was used to compare with the pre-IC level collected before the intervention.

Data analysis

The quantitative data (IC questionnaire) were analysed by using an SPSS computer software to compare the IC levels before and after implementing different versions of Cinderella stories. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to describe the data. To determine the statistically significant level, assumptions of normality (histogram), homogeneity of variances, and independence of observation were assessed before performing a t-test analysis. Regarding the qualitative data, the coding method by Saldaña (2009) was used, which had three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. This approach allowed us to understand how students engaged with and analysed the behaviours of characters in each story, recognized and appreciated cultural differences, and connected their cultural perceptions to the narratives. Through this systematic coding process, we were able to capture the nuanced ways in which students' reflections and analyses reflected their growing intercultural competence and understanding.

FINDINGS

The results can be summarised in two main points. First, this study found that Cinderella stories improved students' IC. Of the four aspects of IC (knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness), the *knowledge* aspect improved the most, followed by *perceived* skills, *awareness*, and *attitudes*. In addition, it was found that students developed a better understanding of different cultures and a positive attitude toward cultural differences, learned from the characters' behaviour, developed compassion through the learning activities, increased their sensitivity to forms of social discrimination, and developed an open-minded quality.

Quantitative findings

The quantitative data were collected from the IC questionnaire to measure students' IC levels, consisting of knowledge, perceived skills, awareness, and attitudes. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation was used to determine the IC levels. The criteria to interpret the IC levels were set as follows: 4.21 - 5.00 (*highest level*), 3.41 - 4.20 (*high level*), 2.61 - 3.40 (*neutral level*), 1.81 - 2.60 (*low level*), *and* 1.00 - 1.80 (*lowest level*). After ensuring assumptions were met, a t-test analysis was performed to determine the significance levels of the pre and post data.

Table 1

Comparisons of IC before and after implementing Cinderella stories

Aspects of IC	Pre-implementation			Post-implementation			
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Sig
Knowledge	3.68	0.44	High	4.00	0.28	High	0.011*
Perceived Skills	3.81	0.51	High	4.06	0.44	High	0.097
Awareness	4.01	0.31	High	4.16	0.36	High	0.114
Attitudes	4.14	0.47	High	4.22	0.29	Highest	0.333
Overall	**3.91**	**0.34**	**High**	**4.11**	**0.28**	**High**	**0.025***

*$p < 0.05$

After using Cinderella stories, students reported a significant improvement in their IC. The study's pre- and post-intervention data analysis revealed noteworthy shifts in participants' IC scores. Before implementing Cinderella stories, the participants exhibited a high score of 3.91 ($SD = 0.34$). Following the integration of the stories, the average score experienced a discernible increase, reaching 4.11 ($SD = 0.28$). The marked development observed in the knowledge dimension of IC was of particular significance. Initially scored at 3.68 ($SD = 0.44$), this knowledge dimension showed substantial progress, culminating in a post-intervention score 4.00 ($SD = 0.28$). Similarly, the skill and awareness components exhibited positive growth, with pre-intervention scores of 3.81 ($SD = 0.51$) and 4.01 ($SD = 0.31$), respectively, advancing to post-intervention scores of 4.06 ($SD = 0.44$) for skills and 4.16 ($SD = 0.36$) for awareness. In comparison, the attitude aspect demonstrated a more modest improvement, as pre-intervention scores of 4.14 ($SD = 0.47$) slightly increased to post-intervention scores of 4.22 ($SD = 0.29$). This data underscores the discernible impact of the Cinderella stories on enhancing IC across various dimensions.

A paired-sample t-test was used to analyse data following a normal distribution. Table 2 shows the findings before and after incorporating Cinderella stories. The post-implementation average score of 4.11 ($SD = 0.28$) exhibits a statistically significant enhancement compared to the pre-intervention score of 3.91 ($SD = 0.34$), substantiated by the results of a t-test analysis, $t(21) = 2.416$, $p < .05$. Further scrutiny of the data highlights a significant increase in knowledge scores after the utilisation of Cinderella stories, with the post-intervention mean score of 4.00 ($SD = 0.28$) showing improvement from the pre-intervention mean score of 3.68 ($SD = 0.44$), as supported by another t-test analysis, $t(21) = 2.808$, $p < .05$. However, no statistically significant differences are observed in attitudes, skills, and awareness dimensions. For an in-depth breakdown of the distinct components constituting IC, please refer to the comprehensive analysis provided in Table 3. These findings underscore the positive impact of integrating Cinderella stories in enhancing IC and overall competence among the study participants.

Table 2

Comparisons of the knowledge aspect in IC before and after implementing Cinderella stories

Knowledge	Pre		Post		Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. I knew the essential norms and taboos of the different cultures.	3.82	0.66	4.22	0.53	.009*
2. I could contrast important aspects of the different cultures with my own culture.	3.86	0.64	4.41	0.67	.004*
3. I could contrast my behaviours with the different cultures in important areas.	3.86	0.71	4.00	0.62	.480

Knowledge	Pre		Post		Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
4. I could describe interactional behaviours common among the different cultures in social and professional areas.	3.77	0.81	3.86	0.64	.665
5. I could discuss and contrast various behavioural patterns in my culture with those of different cultures.	3.55	0.74	3.77	0.61	.171
6. I could cite a definition of culture and describe its components and complexities.	3.05	1.05	3.68	0.84	.023*
7. I recognised signs of cultural stress and some strategies for overcoming it.	3.68	1.13	3.86	0.83	.529
8. I knew some techniques to aid my learning of the different cultures.	4.23	0.69	4.36	0.73	.480
9. I could describe a model of cross-cultural adjustment stages.	3.36	1.09	3.95	0.49	.039*
10. I could cite various learning processes and strategies for learning about and adjusting to different cultures	3.63	1.05	3.86	0.71	.308

Examination of Table 2 reveals the presence of four statements that achieved statistical significance (items 1, 2, 6, and 9). Notably, the students indicated that the integration of Cinderella stories led to an enhanced comprehension of vital cultural norms and taboos across diverse cultures (item 1), $t(21) = 2.881$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, students reported an increased capability to discern and compare crucial facets of other cultures with their own (item 2), $t(21) = 3.196$, $p < 05$. Another notable outcome was students' elevated confidence in articulating a definition of culture, its multifaceted components, and inherent complexity (item 6), $t(21) = 2.453$, $p < .05$. Lastly, students conveyed an improved understanding of the model delineating stages of cross-cultural adaptation (item 9), $t(21) = 2.200$, $p < .05$. Conversely, the remaining statements did not attain statistical significance. The ensuing section directs attention towards statements concerning the attitudinal dimension of IC.

Table 3

Comparisons of the perceived IC skills before and after implementing Cinderella stories

Perceived IC skills	Pre		Post		Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
11. I demonstrated flexibility when interacting with persons from different cultures.	4.05	0.90	3.91	0.87	.544
12. I adjusted my behaviour, dress, etc. as appropriate to avoid offending the different cultures.	3.95	1.05	4.50	0.74	.011*
13. I was able to contrast the different cultures with my own culture.	4.18	0.80	4.14	0.47	.825
14. I used strategies for learning about different cultures.	3.68	1.17	4.18	0.66	.094
15. I demonstrated a capacity to interact appropriately in various social situations.	3.86	0.77	3.91	0.81	.862
16. I used appropriate strategies for adapting to the different cultures and reducing stress.	3.95	1.13	4.05	0.72	.740
17. I used culture-specific information to improve my style and personal interaction.	3.50	0.67	4.09	0.87	.009*
18. I helped to resolve cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings when they arose.	3.32	1.04	3.73	0.98	.107

Upon reviewing Table 3, it is evident that there is statistical significance in only two statements (items 12 and 17) regarding the skills aspect of IC in relation to the incorporation of Cinderella

stories. In item 21, the participants demonstrated an ability to adapt their behaviour, attire, and other aspects after engaging with Cinderella stories, thus reducing the risk of unintentionally offending other cultures, $t(21) = 2.806$, $p < .05$. Similarly, in item 26, participants showed an improved ability to incorporate culture-specific information into their style and interactions, exceeding their previous proficiency, $t(21) = 2.890$, $p < .05$. However, no other statements showed significant statistical findings. The subsequent section will elaborate on the statements regarding the awareness dimension of IC.

Table 4

Comparisons of the awareness aspect in IC before and after implementing Cinderella stories

Awareness	Pre		Post		Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
19. There are differences and similarities between my own culture and the other cultures.	4.32	0.89	4.41	0.59	.693
20. Varied situations in the different cultures required modifying my interactions.	4.27	0.63	4.09	0.75	.427
21. I am a culturally conditioned person with personal habits and preferences.	3.77	1.07	4.09	0.81	.259
22. Diversity in the different cultures. (such as differences in race, gender, age)	4.68	0.57	4.64	0.49	.715
23. Dangers of generalising individual behaviours as representative of the whole culture.	3.86	1.13	4.32	0.78	.135
24. My choices and consequences. (which made me less or more acceptable)	4.14	0.64	4.23	0.69	.628
25. My values affected my approach to ethical dilemmas and their resolution.	3.64	0.95	3.82	1.05	.427
26. The different cultures reacted to me which reflected their cultural values.	4.09	0.75	4.32	0.65	.285
27. My values and ethics were reflected in specific situations.	4.00	0.62	3.86	0.89	.480
28. Varying cultural effects in social and working situations.	4.00	1.02	4.36	0.58	.213
29. My level of intercultural development.	4.05	0.65	4.23	0.61	.257
30. The level of intercultural development of those I worked with.	4.00	0.69	4.18	0.66	.446
31. I perceived myself as a communicator, facilitator, and mediator in an intercultural situation.	3.32	1.09	3.59	1.14	.355

*p < .05

After analysing Table 4, which assesses the awareness of IC in relation to the introduction of Cinderella stories, the results show no significant differences across all the statements. This means that using Cinderella stories did not lead to noticeable changes in the students' responses regarding their awareness of IC.

Table 5

Comparisons of the attitude aspect of IC before and after implementing Cinderella stories

Attitude	Pre		Post		Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
32. I learn from the different cultures.	4.55	0.60	4.55	0.51	1.000
33. I try to communicate and behave in appropriate ways.	4.64	0.58	4.59	0.50	.771
34. I deal with my emotions and frustrations with the different cultures.	2.95	1.13	3.68	0.95	.023*
35. I take on various roles appropriate to different situations.	4.00	1.02	4.00	0.69	1.000
36. I show interest in new cultural aspects.	3.82	1.05	4.18	0.66	.162
37. I try to understand differences in behaviours, values, attitudes and styles.	4.55	0.67	4.50	0.74	.789
38. I adapt my behaviour to communicate appropriately with different cultures.	4.14	0.77	4.09	0.61	.862
39. I reflect on the impact and consequences of my decisions and choices.	4.36	0.85	4.36	0.73	1.000
40. I deal with the different ways of perceiving, expressing, interacting, and behaving.	4.23	0.87	4.09	0.61	.451

*$p < .05$

As illustrated in Table 5, assessing the attitudinal facet of IC before and after the integration of Cinderella stories reveals a sole statement (item 34) demonstrating statistical significance. students communicated that following the incorporation of Cinderella stories, they exhibited an enhanced capacity to manage their emotions and frustrations about diverse cultures, $t(21) = 2.460$, $p < .05$. Conversely, the remaining statements did not exhibit a statistically significant difference. Notably, specific mean scores of the statements decreased after introducing the stories (items 33, 38, and 40), while others remained the same (items 35 and 39). Therefore, the following section will focus on the qualitative part of the study.

Qualitative findings

It was found that implementing different Cinderella stories with the designed activities helped students enhance their understanding of culture. The activities used different Cinderella stories and allowed students to reflect on their attitudes.

Learning from the characters' behaviours

The diverse Cinderella stories presented in this study offer a rich tapestry of character behaviours, each reflecting unique cultural values and moral lessons. Students reported gaining valuable insights into cultural differences and the importance of respecting and understanding different perspectives by analysing these characters.

Each character in the various Cinderella stories exhibits unique behaviours that lead to different outcomes, reflecting the moral values of their respective cultures. The behaviour and moral lessons vary from one culture to another, which are found to promote students' cultural knowledge and awareness. By creating a mind-mapping infographic, students were tasked with analysing characters Cinderella, the Stepmother, Cinderella's Father, the two stepsisters,

the Prince, and the magic birds. Working in groups, students were assigned a character and asked to suggest what they would do if they were in that character's position (see Figure 1).
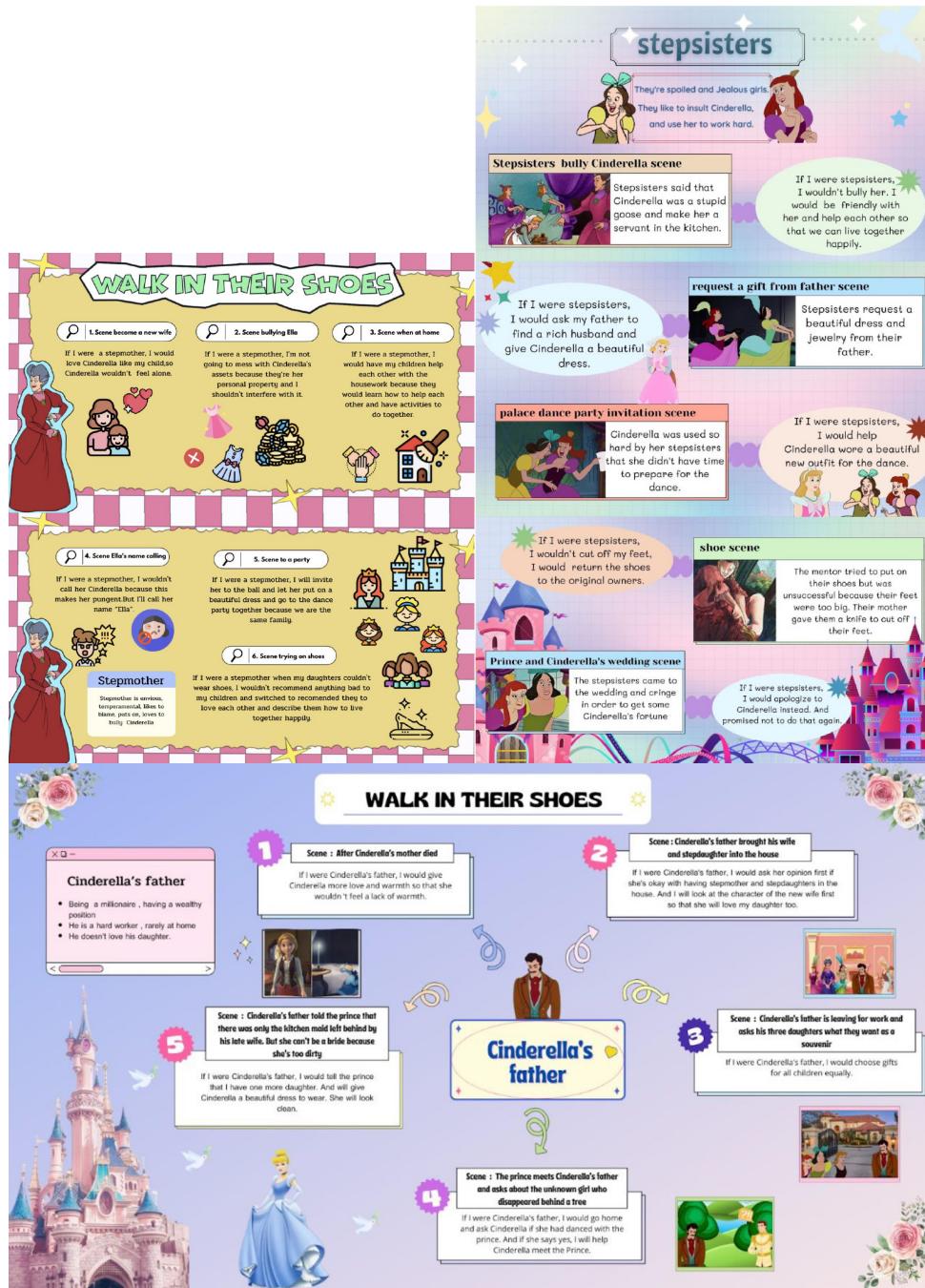

Figure 1 Students' assignment on mind mapping: 'Walking in their shoes

Through a mind-mapping activity, students were asked to analyse the behaviours of Cinderella, the Stepmother, Cinderella's Father, the two stepsisters, the Prince, and the magic birds.

This exercise encouraged them to consider how they would have acted in each character's situation, revealing their personal beliefs, values, and cultural norms. The mind-mapping infographics created by the students demonstrated their understanding of cultural behaviours and ability to apply these insights to their lives. They could identify socially acceptable norms and taboos within each culture, contrasting the behaviours of different characters. This analysis highlighted the profound influence of culture from the characters on human behaviour, from communication styles to interpersonal interactions.

> The most important thing I learned in this lesson is respectfulness. Treating people with kindness and respect is necessary for any situation. Respect is a way to see and appreciate others. (Reflective writing: Student-22 / Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale)

One of the key themes that emerged from the students' reflections was the importance of respect. One student noted, "Respectfulness is the most important thing I learned in this lesson. Treating people with kindness and respect is necessary for any situation." This sentiment aligns with the cultural values emphasised in many of the Cinderella stories, where respect for others, regardless of their social status or background, is a central theme. By learning from the characters' behaviours, students developed a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and respecting different perspectives. This cultural awareness is essential for fostering positive intercultural interactions and building relationships across cultural boundaries.

Exploring cultural diversity through Cinderella stories

Using diverse Cinderella stories in the classroom provides a rich opportunity for students to explore and appreciate different cultural perspectives. By examining elements such as clothing, beliefs, festivals, and the magical elements at the end of each story, students can identify the unique aspects of each culture.

Magic
How does the story define the Hmong people?
SS: The Hmong people are related to respecting the spirits of their ancestors. Sacred things about nature that are up in the sky, the river, the mountain, and the forest.
What makes this culture unique?
SS: The villagers believed that these beliefs would help diagnose the disease correctly and be treated effectively because all their illnesses result from evil spirits, so how do you need to deal with ghosts so that people can recover from diseases such as ghosts.
How is the Hmong culture similar to and different from Thailand?
SS: They have the same belief in ghosts. Ancestor spirits or holy things, there are different beliefs that most of the Hmong adhere to the Hmong religion. Most Thai people practice Buddhism

(Extract from students' group brainstorm assignment Lesson 1)

A brainstorming activity, where students were asked to discuss the Hmong culture as depicted in one of the Cinderella stories, demonstrated their developing intercultural knowledge. They could identify key cultural beliefs, such as the importance of respecting ancestor spirits, and compare these beliefs to their cultural understanding.

"The most interesting thing in this lesson is the cultural differences and social values. That is like experiencing something new. I think the differences between cultures are a beautiful contrast. Accepting diversity of religion, ethnicity, or personal beliefs without discrimination or judgement." (Reflective writing: Student-14/ Walt Disney's Cinderella).

"I will extend my knowledge and analyse cultures with understanding. Language, clothes, food, thoughts, beliefs, etc. It is knowledge that can properly adjust, behave or communicate with people in other cultures." (Reflective writing: Student-19/ The Grimm Brothers' Cinderella).

"I learned that we have to respect the cultures of other areas as well. We should not be based on our own culture as the centre of the universe and get to know more about the diversity of cultures." (Reflective writing: Student-13/ The Persian Cinderella).

The students' reflections further emphasised their appreciation for cultural diversity. They recognised the beauty of cultural differences and the importance of accepting and embracing them without prejudice. One excerpt noted, "The most interesting thing in this lesson is the cultural differences and social values. That is like experiencing something new."

By engaging with these culturally diverse Cinderella stories, students developed a deeper understanding of cultural distinctions and their implications for human behaviour. This cultural knowledge can help them adapt to different cultural contexts, communicate more effectively, and foster respectful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

Developing positive attitudes through learning activities

Each version of the Cinderella story shares a similar plot: the step-sibling is full of envy, mistreats Cinderella, and wants to be superior to her by marrying a wealthy man.

The most important thing I learned in this lesson is about bullying in the family. In the story, the girl was treated by her twin sister as a servant. If this situation happens in real life, the girl might panic or lose concentration, harming her well-being. (Student-08/ Adelaida: A Cuban Cinderella)

"I think I will apply good things such as morals from the story and attitudes of Cinderella to use in my daily life. It can be seen that Cinderella will do much work, and their stepfamily bullies her, but she can still show the elegant way to people." (Reflective writing: Student-10 / The Grimm Brothers' Cinderella)

The students' reflections on the stories demonstrate their ability to identify unacceptable behaviours and develop positive attitudes towards others. They recognised the harmful effects of bullying and expressed compassion for Cinderella's situation. Moreover, they were inspired by Cinderella's resilience and her ability to maintain a positive attitude despite adversity.

By analysing the characters' behaviours and the moral lessons embedded in the stories, students developed a deeper understanding of the importance of compassion, empathy, and non-discrimination. This knowledge can help them navigate their relationships and interactions with others more positively and respectfully.

Engaging students in reflective writing

To foster the development of IC, students were assigned reflective writing tasks at the end of each Cinderella story. Four guiding prompts were provided: What were my most interesting discoveries while working on this lesson? What were some of my most challenging moments in learning this lesson? What is the most important thing I learned personally? How will I use what I have learned in the future? While these prompts served as a framework, students were encouraged to write freely and express their true opinions. Each learner completed seven reflections, one for each unit.

Reflective writing was intentionally used to deepen students' intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. Although writing assignments can be challenging for secondary school students, especially in expressing their thoughts, they could write in Thai or English, according to their preference. As students engaged in these reflections, their growing understanding of intercultural concepts became evident.

The data collected from their reflective writing demonstrates their developing IC and serves as quantitative evidence to assess this growth. Through this process, reflective writing has proven to be a powerful tool for enhancing and measuring students' IC.

DISCUSSION

This study's culturally diverse Cinderella stories played a pivotal role in fostering IC among Thai secondary students. By exposing students to a broad spectrum of cultural narratives, these stories provided a rich and immersive experience that deepened their understanding of global diversity. The quantitative data in this study demonstrates a significant IC improvement after participating in the intervention involving culturally diverse Cinderella stories. The improvements were observed across all four IC dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, perceived skills, and awareness. Moreover, the most significant improvement was observed in the knowledge dimension, indicating that the students understood different cultures and cultural differences. While there was a noticeable improvement in attitudes, it was less pronounced than the changes in knowledge and perceived skills. This suggests that developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences may require more sustained efforts. The students significantly improved their intercultural communication and interaction skills, indicating that the intervention effectively equipped them with practical tools for navigating diverse cultural contexts (Rajani Na Ayuthaya, 2018). Additionally, the students showed a moderate improvement in their awareness of IC. This suggests that while they became more aware of the importance of intercultural understanding, their self-reflection and cultural self-awareness may still need further development.

The qualitative data provided empirical evidence to indicate that the selected Cinderella stories could be used to foster a deeper understanding of different cultures among Thai secondary students. Students demonstrated a heightened awareness of cultural practices, beliefs, and values, recognising the diversity and richness of other cultural perspectives (Bagui & Adder, 2020; Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020). Also, the students developed more positive attitudes towards cultural differences, expressing openness, respect, and empathy. They recognised the importance of understanding and appreciating diverse cultures, demonstrating a willingness to engage with people from different backgrounds (Cantizano, 2020; Gómez Rodríguez, 2014). Students gained a deeper understanding of cultural norms, taboos, and the complexities of cross-cultural interactions, which contributed significantly to improving the knowledge dimension of IC. Students were encouraged to explore different cultural perspectives and develop their artistic sensitivity and adaptability through mind mapping, writing their own Cinderella stories, board discussions, and debates.

The designed activities, such as mind-mapping, writing their own Cinderella stories, board discussions, and debates, promoted students' cultural sensitivity and adaptability. These activities encouraged students to reflect on their cultural perspectives and recognise the importance of cultural awareness (Zhang & Zhou, 2019). The stories also played a crucial role in developing students' intercultural skills. By analysing the characters' behaviours and decisions within their cultural frameworks, students could practice interpreting and adapting to various cultural contexts. This practical application of intercultural communication skills is essential for navigating diverse cultural settings.

Selecting different Cinderella stories provides various benefits. For example, students can compare their culture with the culture depicted in the Cinderella stories, identifying similarities and differences. In addition, students demonstrated increased sensitivity to social discrimination and the importance of treating others with respect, regardless of their cultural background (Lee et al., 2023). We noticed that students developed strategies for effective intercultural communication, such as active listening, clear and concise language, and avoiding stereotypes. Letting the students write their reflections by the end of each lesson promoted students' reflection on their cultural perspectives and biases, recognising the impact they can have on intercultural interactions (Wong & Blissett, 2007; Xiao-mei, 2019).

The culturally diverse Cinderella stories likely influenced students' attitudes by challenging their preconceived notions and encouraging them to appreciate cultural differences. Students developed a more positive outlook towards diversity as they compared their cultural backgrounds with those depicted in the stories (Rodríguez, 2014; Tananuraksakul & Soontornwipat, 2021). While this shift in attitude was less pronounced than the improvements in knowledge or skills, it is crucial for fostering respect, empathy, and open-mindedness, which are essential components of IC.

Regarding the perceived IC skills, which means the ability to observe, listen and interpret (Byram, 1997), the narratives provided students valuable opportunities to practice interpreting and adapting to various cultural contexts. By analysing the characters' behaviours and decisions within their cultural frameworks, students honed their ability to navigate diverse cultural

settings. This practical application of intercultural communication skills suggests that the stories were influential in developing these competencies.

The awareness dimension of IC was enhanced as students reflected on their cultural biases and recognised the importance of being culturally sensitive. The stories prompted them to consider their cultural perspectives and how these might influence their interactions with others (Baldasaro, Maldonado & Baltes, 2014). Although the improvement in awareness was moderate, the exercise of self-reflection was a crucial step in fostering greater cultural self-awareness.

Furthermore, by encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and learning, teachers can help them process and internalise cultural information. Reflective writing allows students to connect the cultural lessons from the Cinderella stories with their own experiences and perspectives, deepening their understanding of cultural differences (Xiao-mei, 2019). It also helps students identify their cultural biases and assumptions, making them more aware of how their backgrounds influence their perceptions of other cultures. Furthermore, reflective writing fosters empathy and understanding by prompting students to consider the perspectives and experiences of the characters in the stories, enhancing their appreciation for cultural diversity (Hagar, 2018). Additionally, it encourages students to apply their cultural knowledge to real-world situations, equipping them with practical skills for effective intercultural communication.

Multicultural short stories were found to develop critical intercultural skills, deepen cultural comprehension, and enhance language proficiency (Feeney & Gajaseni, 2020; Rajani Na Ayuthaya, 2018; Tananuraksakul & Soontornwipat, 2021). The study sought to determine effective methods for integrating these narratives into the classroom to foster students' IC. Incorporating Cinderella stories in this study may inherently introduce cultural distinctions that diverge from the students' backgrounds, particularly among secondary school students. Encouraging students to reflect on these cultural differences facilitates the assigned tasks and serves as a constructive starting point for deeper discussions on intercultural communication. Teachers can utilise diverse discussion techniques and probing inquiries to guide students in comprehending the complexities of intercultural interactions. Echoing the insights gleaned from (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023), which emphasises the importance of considering students' cultural backgrounds in character development, literature reading comprehension can serve as a means to foster cultural awareness and respect. These findings align with the current study, supporting adopting a multifaceted educational approach that addresses practical skills and cultural sensitivities crucial for effective intercultural communication.

Reflective writing is a powerful tool for fostering IC among EFL learners by promoting deep understanding and personal growth. While various classroom activities and authentic situations can enhance IC, reflective writing offers a unique opportunity for students to engage in thoughtful introspection. By reflecting on their experiences and learning, students can develop a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, empathy, and practical intercultural skills (Xiao-mei, 2019; Zhou & Pilcher, 2018). However, there are challenges to consider when using reflective writing to promote IC. For example, language barriers may hinder students' ability to express their

thoughts, particularly in a foreign language. Still, teachers can mitigate this by providing clear supporting guidelines allowing students to write in their preferred language as positive reinforcement. Despite these challenges, the benefits of reflective writing are significant. It deepens students' cultural understanding, enhances their cultural awareness by encouraging the identification of biases, fosters empathy by considering diverse perspectives, and helps develop practical skills for intercultural communication. Furthermore, reflective writing allows teachers to track students' progress and identify areas for improvement, supporting their ongoing development in IC (Hagar, 2018; Nardon, 2019). By addressing potential challenges and integrating reflective practices effectively, teachers can use reflective writing to cultivate a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, empathy, and practical skills in their students.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The utilisation of diverse Cinderella stories in this study has proven effective in enhancing students' IC and garnering positive responses from the students involved. These stories serve as valuable educational resources for teachers seeking to cultivate IC within their classrooms. In this study, only seven Cinderella stories were implemented. There are alternative versions that could be explored and used as a learning tool for IC

Teaching IC emphasises promoting intercultural knowledge, skills and awareness. Teachers should engage students by designing student-centred activities that stimulate students to engage in profound discussions about the cultural elements embedded in narratives. For example, teachers could organise a role-playing activity where students reenact scenes from the Cinderella story they have read, but with a twist or their versions. They can set the story in a different cultural context and time and then discuss how these changes impact the cultural elements in their narratives. This approach encourages students to think critically about the impact of culture on storytelling. Before the classroom activity, students could read the stories by themselves. After the activity, teachers should assist students in reflecting on the cultural aspects they gained from the reading. Moreover, teachers must refrain from explicitly instructing students about different cultures. Instead, they should foster group collaboration and enable students to learn through hands-on tasks, creativity, and understanding diverse cultural perspectives.

This study underscores the pivotal role of narratives incorporated with designed activities and students' reflective writing in nurturing IC within English language teaching (ELT) context. The findings emphasise that exposure to diverse narratives enhances linguistic proficiency and profoundly influences students' intercultural comprehension and attitudes towards cultural diversity. Students' reflective writing also plays a vital role in promoting IC since they process their cultural knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills to observe, listen and evaluate other cultures. English teachers are crucial in guiding students towards embracing cultural heterogeneity by weaving culturally diverse content into their pedagogical approaches, immersing students in captivating narratives that empower them to deal with unfamiliar cultural settings, igniting a sense of curiosity and empathy. Furthermore, integrating diverse cultural perspectives through student-centred activities facilitates the organic growth of IC.

By fostering a global perspective and encouraging authentic interactions with diverse communities, teachers contribute to moulding individuals who possess an international outlook, adeptly navigating an interconnected world with empathy, understanding, and a shared spirit of mutual respect.

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Appendix A

Designed course syllabus

Unit	Name	Aspects of IC	Learning objectives	Assignment	Periods
-	Introduction	-	Understand the scope of learning by using Cinderella stories	-	1
1	Disney	Respect	Value of others	Discussion board	2-3
2	Grim brother's	Self-awareness /Identity	Understand the perspective through which each person views the world.	Mind mapping	4-5
	Students make an initial project.			**Video**	**6-9**
	Expectation	students will be divided into groups. They must brainstorm to plan their group project.			6
		students have to show the progress of their project (at least they understand the whole story).			7
		students have to present the draft.			8
		The project must be completed at least 90 percent. It must be uploaded on YouTube.com before the next three days.			9
3	Cuban	Seeing from others' perspectives/ world	Identify similar and different cultures	Venn diagram	10-11
4	Hmong	Listening to other voices	Engage in authentic intercultural dialogue	Discussion board	12-13
5	African	Adaptation	Be able to ship temporarily from another perspective	Discussion board	14-15
6	Egyptian	Relationship building	Forge lasting intercultural personal bonds	Interview task	16-17
7	Persian	Cultural humanity	Combine respect with self-awareness	Debate	18-19
-	Summary	Intercultural Competence	Share students' perspective	Reflective paper	20
	Students make a final project.			Students' versions of Cinderella	6-9