

Using Literature Circles to Develop Critical Reading Skills: A Study of Thai and Chinese Students in an English Literature Classroom

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 8 Jan 2025 Last revised: 24 Aug 2026 Accepted: 24 Aug 2026 Available online: 28 Aug 2026 Keywords: Literature circles Critical reading Literature classroom	<i>This study explores the use of literature circles in developing critical reading skills among Thai and Chinese students in an English literature classroom in a Thai university context. The objectives were (1) to compare the critical reading skills of Thai and Chinese students before and after implementing literature circle activities and (2) to analyze the students' strengths and weaknesses in using literature circles to enhance critical reading skills. The population consisted of 46 third-year Thai and Chinese students in the English for International Communication (International Program) from a literary appreciation course. The study employed a mixed-method research design with simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through critical reading tests, online questionnaires, and observations over one semester, during which students participated in Literature Circle activities following a six-week lesson plan. Quantitative data were analyzed using a t-test, means, percentages, standard deviation, while qualitative data were examined through descriptive tabular analysis. The results indicate that Chinese students demonstrated statistically significant improvements in post-test score, whereas Thai students did not show statistically significant gains. The questionnaire revealed that Thai students excelled in identifying facts from opinions, while Chinese students were better at analyzing the logic of content. However, Thai students struggled with evaluating information, while Chinese students faced challenges in researching and analyzing information sources. The findings suggest that while literature circles are valuable for developing critical reading skills, their implementation requires thoughtful adaptation to address cultural, linguistic, and logistical challenges, especially in multicultural classrooms.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Reading in English is essential for university students, particularly those majoring in English. Developing critical reading skills is necessary to enable students to comprehend written texts in various forms accurately. However, English critical reading skills and proficiency levels at the university level vary due to several factors, including educational background, learning

experience, additional study, use of English in daily life, practice, and access to support. Scholars in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have consistently identified vocabulary and grammar comprehension as common challenges. For example, Duangloy (2015) highlighted that “English’s extensive vocabulary and complex grammar rules often cause difficulties for students in comprehension and accurate usage” (p. 153). Furthermore, Malelohit (2023) identified “a lack of critical thinking as another major obstacle, as students often read texts uncritically, which hinders their ability to interpret and analyze content thoroughly” (p. 145).

Various studies have attempted to address these issues and enhance English reading proficiency. For instance, Ratchadavisitthakul and Somboon (2019) developed exercises using authentic materials, while Malelohit (2023) applied Murdoch’s Integrated Approach to improve analytical and critical reading skills. Other approaches include the use of transitivity analysis (Punkasirikul, 2018) and multiple reading strategies (Pantito, 2020). These studies emphasize the ongoing efforts to improve students’ reading skills.

From 2017 to 2024, research on literature circles has consistently focused on enhancing reading comprehension, critical thinking, and engagement in EFL contexts. Early studies explored their impact on reading desire (Karatay, 2017), critical reading skills (Kaowiwattanukul, 2021; Sutrisno et al., 2018; Sutrisno et al., 2019) and analytical thinking (Aksornkan, 2019). Over time, the scope expanded to include developing listening and speaking skills (Isozaki, 2018; Kaowiwattanukul, 2020) and fostering intercultural awareness (Inree & Thongrin, 2019). From 2020 onwards, integrating literature circles (henceforth LCs) with digital platforms and online learning environments became a significant trend (Aprillia, 2022; Chen, 2020) reflecting the growing importance of technology in education. Research also highlights teachers’ and students’ perceptions, addressing the strengths, challenges, and effectiveness of LCs in the classroom (Hidayat & Musthafa, 2020; Novitasari et al., 2021; Rachmajanti & Sulistyo, 2021). More recent studies emphasize innovative applications, such as combining LCs with self-regulated learning (Kassem, 2022) and refining instructional models (Wen, 2024). This evolution underscores the diversity of LCs in promoting literacy, engagement, collaboration, and higher-order thinking skills in diverse educational settings. However, while studies focus on LCs in various contexts including Thailand and China, there is a lack of comparative research on how their different cultural backgrounds affect the effectiveness of LCs. This study will provide insights into how LCs influence critical reading skills across two distinct cultural groups, offering valuable data on cultural differences in collaborative learning. Moreover, this study will provide practical recommendations for educators in culturally diverse classrooms, enhancing teaching strategies for critical reading and intercultural understanding.

Consequently, the researcher sought to answer the question of how implementing LC activities in English instruction would influence students’ reading skills and help students develop their critical reading skills more effectively. The research results provide answers to two primary research questions:

- (1) Is there a difference in the critical reading skills of Thai and Chinese students before and after using LC activities?
- (2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of Thai and Chinese students in critical reading skills after implementing LC activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical reading in language classroom

Pardede (2007) defines critical reading as the application of critical thinking in reading activities. It is an active and purposeful process of comprehending, questioning, and evaluating printed material and reacting intelligently to the writer's ideas. Niculescu and Dragomir (2023) stated that "[c]ritical reading is essential as it allows individuals to evaluate the quality and credibility of information they encounter in various forms of text." (p. 219). Appatova and Horning (2023) stated that "[i]t goes beyond the comprehension of questioning and evaluating underlying messages and ideologies" (p. 4). Reading critically examines the deep structure of the text and aspects such as logical consistency, tone, and organization, along with other significant factors that contribute to a more thorough understanding. In the language classroom, critical reading goes beyond understanding the literal meaning of texts. It involves analyzing, questioning, and evaluating the messages communicated within texts to uncover underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and biases. Christensen (2006, as cited in Hall & Piazza, 2010). This approach encourages learners to interact with texts actively, rather than passively consuming information, and equips them to engage in meaningful dialogue with texts and society

In the field of EFL, critical theory proponents encourage learners to be more active and critical in their approach to understanding texts. Pinchai and Sojisirikul (2024) explain that critical reading involves active engagement with a text through analysis, evaluation, synthesis, questioning, note-taking and consideration of the text's purpose, structure, audience, and language features.

Literature circles

According to Vygotsky's (1978) proposed that cognitive development first occurs through social interaction before being internalized at the individual level (p. 57). From this perspective, LCs provide opportunities for learners to construct understanding through discussion and interaction with peers. LCs are a reading strategy that emphasizes learner engagement and is commonly used in language and literature studies. They encourage students to engage in deep discussions and collaborative work with the texts they read. In LCs, learners are divided into small groups, with each group choosing their reading and topics to be discussed (Monyanont, 2019). LCs enhance critical thinking skills by fostering active learning and social interaction, key components of constructivist theory (Minh, 2024), which suggests that learners construct knowledge through experiences and interactions. In a typical LCs setup, each member of the group takes on a specific role, which are discussion director, word wizard, illustrator, connector, summarizer, passage master, researcher, and character captain (Naser, 2023). The major roles and their function are summarized as in Table 1.

Table 1
The major roles and functions

LC roles	Functions
Discussion director	Leads the group discussion by encouraging members to share ideas.
Word wizard	Finds interesting words in the text and explains their meanings.
Illustrator	Creates drawings related to important events, ideas, or scenes in the text.
Connector	Makes connections between the text and personal experiences.
Summarizer	Summarizes the main ideas, plot from the assigned reading.
Passage master	Selects interesting passages from the text and explains why they are important.
Researcher	Finds additional information related to the text.
Character captain	Examines character's traits, actions, motivations, and development.

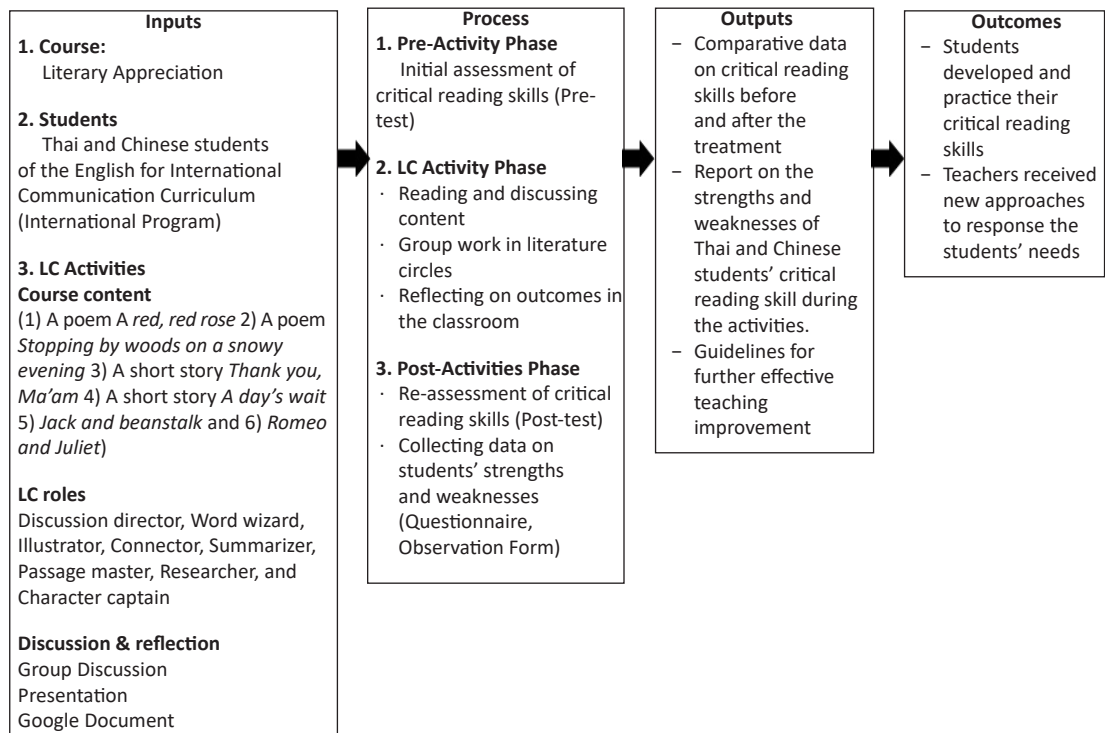
Each role in the literature circle enhances different aspects of critical thinking. The discussion director develops analytical and evaluative thinking by guiding discussions with open-ended questions. The word wizard strengthens interpretative skills by analyzing key vocabulary in context. The illustrator promotes creative and analytical thinking by visualizing key scenes or themes. The connector fosters reflective and comparative thinking by linking the text to real-life events and other references. The summarizer enhances synthesis and comprehension by summarizing the main ideas. The passage master sharpens analytical thinking by selecting significant passages and explaining their relevance. The researcher develops inquiry and evaluative skills by gathering and assessing background information. Finally, the character captain builds inferential and moral reasoning skills by analyzing character motivations and development. By practicing each role, students engage with the text from multiple perspectives, fostering well-rounded critical reading skills. These roles provide structure to the discussions and ensure that various aspects of the text are explored. The goals of LCs include enhancing comprehension, fostering a love of reading, developing critical thinking skills, and promoting collaborative learning. Through discussions, students not only explore literary aspects of the text, such as themes, characters, and plot development but also connect the text to their own experiences. Even though each student takes on entirely different tasks, they study the same text. This allows the text to be viewed from multiple perspectives, providing a deeper understanding of the book or subject being studied.

LCs offer numerous benefits that increase collaboration among learners. They serve as an engaging post-reading activity and are an excellent example of an activity suited for a learner-centered classroom. LCs enhance student engagement in the reading process, increase students' level of participation and self-expression, foster critical thinking skills, enhance comprehension of complex texts, and create an enjoyable learning atmosphere (Naser, 2023; Novitasari et al., 2021; Talenta & Himawati, 2023). Rahman (2022) points out that "LCs are more effective than Directed Reading Activities and improve students' reading skills across all levels, including literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and critical comprehension" (p. 7). Moreover, LCs in literature classes significantly improved multicultural competencies, with the most notable progress observed in developing personality traits (Sriwisan, 2021), and intercultural awareness that encourages critical thinking, openness, and empathy toward cultural diversity (Inree & Thongrin, 2019).

Related studies

LCs have been widely implemented across various educational contexts, from secondary to higher education. The LC approach demonstrates flexibility in facilitating learners across all education levels to meet their academic needs. While kindergarten and primary levels focus on fostering a love of reading, improving basic literacy skills, and encouraging social interaction among young learners, the shift to secondary education emphasizes the development of critical thinking and effective communication (Children's Literacy Initiative, 2017). In higher education, LCs are utilized to encourage deeper textual analysis, collaborative learning, critical literacy, cultural competence, and interdisciplinary applications. Regarding the suitability of LCs for higher education, a review of previous studies indicates strong support from scholars. For instance, Rahman (2022) and Sutrisno et al. (2018) demonstrated that LCs contribute to the development of critical reading skills. Similarly, Talenta and Himawati (2023) reported that LCs increase student engagement. In the context of higher education, Aksornkan (2019) emphasized the value of integrating LCs with higher-order to strengthen students' analytical thinking. Beyond cognitive outcomes, Inree et al. (2019) showed that LCs promote intercultural awareness and collaboration by creating opportunities for students to discuss diverse cultural elements, fostering sensitivity to cultural differences, and challenge existing stereotypes. Supporting these finding, Novitasari et al. (2021) also confirmed that students perceived LCs as an effective approach to improve reading while also supporting the development of critical comprehension skills.

Conceptual framework



This research employed a mixed-method research design and experimental research.

Participants

This study's population consisted of 46 third-year students (15 Thai and 31 Chinese students) from the English for International Communication Program at a medium-size public university in northern Thailand enrolled in the literary appreciation course in the academic year 2024. All students were invited to participate in the study. However, only those who completed both pre-test and post-test were included in the final analysis. Consequently, 32 students (7 of the 15 Thai students and 25 of the 31 Chinese students) successfully completed both tests. Seven Thai and seven Chinese students were randomly selected for the qualitative component to ensure balance between two groups and obtain qualitative insights consistent with the research design.

Data collection

This study employed simple random sampling by drawing lots without replacement to select a balanced sample of 14 students (7 Thai and 7 Chinese) who completed both the pre-test and post-test. A one-group pre-test and post-test design was used to examine change in students' critical reading performance.

Instruments

The researcher developed research instruments to collect data in alignment with the research objectives, as follows:

The critical reading test: The instrument was designed to measure critical reading skills before and after participating in the LC activities. The test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions with four options each, covering the following aspects:

1. Information analysis—2 questions
2. Identifying fact and opinion—2 questions
3. Formulating questions to enhance understanding and further inquiry—2 questions
4. Analyzing the logic of content, principles, reasoning, and presented evidence—2 questions
5. Evaluating the accuracy, completeness, and relevance of information—2 questions
6. Questions based on the short story *Thank you, Ma'am*—5 questions
7. Questions based on the short story *A day's wait*—5 questions

The test underwent a review by three English-language teaching experts from both internal and external institutions to ensure its content validity. They evaluated how well the test aligned with the research objectives. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was calculated and scored at 0.83 indicating that the test was reliable and suitable for use. The test's reliability was assessed using the KR-20, with a value of 0.80. After finalizing the test, the researcher printed it and made revisions based on the feedback from the experts. The revised test was then piloted with 10 third-year English major students who were not part of the study sample to evaluate its difficulty level. Based on these results, further revisions were made, and the test was re-validated by the experts.

The online questionnaire: The researcher developed a questionnaire to gather students' opinions. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items to explore students' feelings, opinions, and experiences related to learning critical reading skills through LC activities. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: 10 items for students' feelings, opinions, and experiences with LC activities; 10 items for learning critical reading skills through LC activities; and 10 items for strengths and weaknesses in critical reading skills using LC activities. The IOC was calculated and scored at 0.67 indicating that the test was reliable and suitable for use.

The observation: The participatory observation form was designed to collect qualitative data by observing students' behavior, interaction, and participation. This qualitative data complemented the quantitative data collection from the opinion questionnaire. The form included date and time, location, strengths, weaknesses, and additional details noted in the classroom. The observation was recorded in narrative form at the end of each class. The observation form was reviewed by three experts to determine IOC, whose resulting value was 1, indicating perfect alignment with the research objective. Therefore, the designed form was suitable for data collection.

Data collection procedures

The researcher carried out data collection using the following steps:

Step 1: Pre-test data collection

In the first week of the course, the researcher informed the students about the activities and data collection process, which was part of the classroom research. Permission to collect data was requested, and students completed a consent form by scanning a QR code to confirm their participation via a Google form. After obtaining consent, students were given an English critical reading skills test in a paper-based format. The test took 30 minutes to complete, and it served as a baseline assessment. The researcher clarified to the students that their score would not affect their course grades and that their personal information would remain confidential.

Step 2: Observation data collection

The researcher conducted activities based on the pre-planned lesson plan by integrating LC activities with the course content. The activities covered six lesson plans, each lasting 3 hours, totaling 18 hours. The selected texts included the poem *A red, red rose* by Robert Burns, the poem *Stopping by woods on a snowy evening* by Robert Frost, the short story *Thank you, Ma'am* by Langston Hughes, the short story *A day's wait* by Ernest Hemingway, the folktale *Jack and the beanstalk*, and the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. During each session, students were assigned rotating roles in small groups. The eight roles were discussion director, word wizard, illustrator, connector, summarizer, passage master, researcher, and character captain. Students rotated roles each week to ensure a variety of responsible roles. At the end of each class session, the researcher completed the observation form to record qualitative data from the classroom environment.

Step 3: Post-test and questionnaire data collection

At the end of the course, during the final week, students completed the post-test using the same set of questions, with the order of questions shuffled. The test was administered in a paper-based format and took 30 minutes to complete. After that, students completed an online opinion questionnaire by scanning the provided QR code. Each student was allowed one response per person, and the questionnaire was anonymous. The researcher clarified once again that the test scores and questionnaire responses would not affect their course grades and that their personal information would remain anonymous.

Step 4: Gathering data

The researcher recorded and stored the scores from the pre-test and post-test, the opinion questionnaire, and collected the observation form into a secure computer database for further analysis.

Data analysis

For quantitative data analysis, the researcher used statistical tools in Microsoft Excel to calculate values for D and D^2 , t-tests, means, and standard deviations (S.D.). These results were used to rank the strengths and weaknesses observed in the study. For qualitative data, the researcher analyzed observation forms using descriptive analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses. The findings were summarized in a SWOT analysis table, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Regarding the findings, t-test comparison tables presented the development observed before and after using LCs, while summary tables displayed the total score, mean, and number of students. Each table was accompanied by a descriptive explanation. Additionally, data from opinion questionnaires were presented in tables showing statistical values such as mean, percentage, and S.D., followed by a narrative explanation. For the qualitative data, the researcher highlighted key themes identified from the observations. The results were then summarized in a SWOT analysis table with a narrative explanation.

RESULTS

To respond to Research Question 1, a total of 32 students out of 46 students completed both pre-test and post-test, representing 69.65 % of the population. The comparative results are as follows.

Table 2
Comparison of critical reading test scores (N = 32)

Scores	n	Full scores	mean	S.D.	df	t	P
Pre-test	32	20	14.56	2.21	31	1.84	0.05
Post-test	32	20	14.88	1.20			

* $p < .05$

Table 2 shows the results of the pre-test and post-test scores for the 32 students (7 Thai and 25 Chinese) who completed both tests. The results indicate that the mean score slightly increased from 14.56 (S.D. = 2.21) in the pre-test to 14.88 (S.D. = 1.20) in the post-test. The t -value was 1.84, which exceeds the critical value of 1.70. The score indicates that the score difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the post-test scores are significantly higher than the pre-test scores.

After conducting a simple random sampling using a drawing method without replacement through the website www.wheelofnames.com, a sample of 14 students (7 Thai and 7 Chinese) was selected, representing 43.75 % of the 32 students who completed both the pre-test and post-test. The comparative results are as follows.

Table 3
Comparison of critical reading test scores of Thai students (N = 7)

Scores	n	Full scores	m	S.D.	df	t	P
Pre-test	7	20	14.71	1.83	6	-1.57	0.05
Post-test	7	20	12.86	2.19			

* $p < .05$

Table 3 shows the results of the English critical reading test scores before and after implementation among 7 Thai students who completed both tests. The finding shows that the mean pre-test score was 14.71 (S.D. = 1.83). The mean post-test score increased to 12.86 (S.D. = 2.19). The t -value for statistical decision-making was -1.57, lower than the critical value of 1.94 from the distribution table. Since the t -value (-1.57) is less than the critical value (1.94), the p -value exceeds 0.05, indicating no statistically significant difference between pre and post-score.

Table 4
Comparison of critical reading test scores of Chinese students (N = 7)

Scores	n	Full scores	m	S.D.	df	t	P
Pre-test	7	20	13.43	1.92	6	2.07	0.05
Post-test	7	20	15.57	2.19			

* $p < .05$

Table 4 shows the results of the English critical reading test scores before and after implementation among 7 Chinese students who completed both tests. The finding shows that the mean pre-test score was 13.43 (S.D. = 1.92). The mean post-test score increased to 15.57 (S.D. = 2.19). The t -value for statistical decision-making was 2.07, higher than the critical value of 1.94 from the distribution table. Since the t -value (2.07) exceeds the critical value (1.94), the p -value is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant increase in the pre and post-score at the 0.05 significance level.

Table 5
Comparison of critical reading test scores before and after implementing LCs of Thai students

No	CODE	Pretest (x)	Posttest (X)	D	D ²
1	EICTH002	14	12	-2	4
2	EICTH003	16	11	-5	25
3	EICTH004	17	17	0	0
4	EICTH005	14	14	0	0
5	EICTH006	11	14	3	9
6	EICTH009	15	12	-3	9
7	EICTH011	16	10	-6	36
	Total	103	90	-13	83
	Average	14.71	12.86		

Table 6
Comparison of critical reading test scores before and after implementing LCs of Chinese students

No	CODE	Pretest (x)	Posttest (X)	D	D ²
1	EICCH001	14	15	1.00	1.00
2	EICCH003	16	17	1.00	1.00
3	EICCH009	14	15	0.00	0.00
4	EICCH011	11	12	1.00	1.00
5	EICCH014	13	18	5.00	25.00
6	EICCH021	11	18	7.00	49.00
7	EICCH024	16	16	0.00	0.00
	Total	94	109	15	77
	Average	13.43	15.57		

In response to Research Question 2, the following critical reading test scores reveal both strengths and weaknesses in students' reading abilities:

Table 7
Strengths and weaknesses in students' reading abilities

Details	Thai students		Chinese students	
	Percentage of correct response		Percentage of correct response	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Number of students	n = 7	n = 7	n = 7	n = 7
Average score	14.71/20	12.86/20	13.43/20	15.57/20
Researching and Analyzing Information Sources (Items 1–2)	66.67%	70%	53.45%	72.06%
Identifying Fact from Opinion (Items 3–4)	91.67%	90%	81.03%	80.88%
Questioning for Information (Items 5–6)	87.50%	60%	87.93%	88.24%
Analyzing the Logic of Content (Items 7–8)	79.17%	75%	89.66%	97.06%
Evaluating Information (Items 9–10)	58.33%	65%	72.41%	82.35%
The ability to apply critical reading skills to real-life situations, inspired by themes and scenarios in the story "Thank you, Ma'am." By Langston Huges (Items 11–15)	51.67%	34%	55.17%	47.65%

Details	Thai students		Chinese students	
	Percentage of correct response		Percentage of correct response	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
The ability to apply critical reading skills to real-life situations, inspired by themes and scenarios in the story "A day's wait." By Ernest Hemingway. (Items 16–20)	68.33%	86%	77.93%	83.53%

**Please see questions in Appendix A.

The implementation of LC activities revealed strengths and weaknesses in the critical reading skills of Thai and Chinese students based on post-test scores. Thai students excelled in identifying facts from opinions (90%), followed by analyzing the logic of content (75%), researching and analyzing information sources (70%), evaluating information (65%), and questioning for information (60%). In contrast, Chinese students demonstrated strong abilities in analyzing the logic of content, with scores improving from the pretest (89.66%) to the post-test (97.06%). They also showed proficiency in questioning for information, with pre-test and post-test scores of 87.93% and 88.24%, respectively, followed by evaluating information (82.35%), identifying facts from opinions (80.88%), and researching and analyzing information sources (72.06%).

In terms of overall performance, Chinese students achieved higher average scores on the post-test, while the Thai group showed a slight decrease in performance. For researching and analyzing information sources, Thai students' results increased by 3.33% from 66.67% to 70%, whereas Chinese students saw a significant increase of 18.61% from 54.45% to 72.06%, highlighting their enhanced ability to identify and analyze relevant information after the intervention. The Thai students' performance improved slightly but started from a relatively higher baseline.

For identifying facts from opinions, Thai students experienced a decrease of 1.67%, while Chinese students showed a minimal decline of 0.15%. Both groups maintained relatively stable performance in this area, with Thai students continuing to demonstrate strong skills.

Regarding questioning for information, Thai students showed a significant decrease of 27.5% from 87.50% to 60%, while Chinese students experienced a slight increase of 0.31% from 81.03% to 80.88%. This notable decline among Thai students may indicate challenges in formulating questions during the post-test, whereas Chinese students maintained consistency in this skill.

For analyzing the logic of content, Thai students showed a slight decrease of 4.17%, from 79.17% to 75%, while Chinese students improved by 7.4%, from 89.66% to 97.06%, indicating enhanced logical analysis and reasoning skills among Chinese students. The Thai students' decrease suggests potential challenges in this area during the post-test.

When it came to evaluating information, both groups showed improvement, with Thai students increasing by 6.67%, from 58.33% to 65%, and Chinese students by 9.94%, from 72.41% to

82.35%. These results indicate better abilities in assessing the accuracy, completeness, and relevance of information, with Chinese students achieving more substantial gains.

In terms of strengths, Chinese students excelled in “Analyzing the Logic of Content,” while Thai students initially demonstrated strong skills in “Distinguishing Facts from Opinions.” For weaknesses, both groups struggled with “Questioning for Information,” and both encountered difficulties applying critical reading skills to the “*Thank you, Ma’am*” scenario.

Qualitative results from observation

An analysis was conducted based on qualitative data collected from observation forms to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students participating in LC activities. The findings are summarized in the following SWOT analysis.

Table 8
SWOT analysis of Thai students

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Effectively performed the role of connector within the group. 2. Performed well as word wizard. 3. In some groups, roles were clearly assigned, and tasks were completed. 4. Demonstrated dedication to assigned responsibilities.	1. Lacked confidence in expressing opinions and asking questions. 2. Limited communication within groups, with a tendency to use mobile phones instead. 3. Insufficient use of English during group discussions. 4. Unclear understanding of the discussion leader role. 5. Hesitation in assigning roles within the group.
Opportunities	Threats
1. Implementing LC techniques can enhance collaborative skills. 2. Creating an environment that emphasizes the use of English in the classroom.	1. Frequent absences disrupt group formation and continuity of weekly LC activities. 2. Forming groups based on the preferable reduces opportunities for collaborative learning.

Table 9
SWOT analysis of Chinese students

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Showed proactivity in researching information online. 2. Assigned roles and fulfilled responsibilities with dedication. 3. Displayed enthusiasm in presenting information. 4. Excelled as summarizer, indicating the ability to summarize content clearly.	1. Predominantly used Chinese during group work, limiting English communication. 2. Some students did not fully understand the activity content. 3. Use of Chinese hindered the instructor’s understanding of group discussions. 4. Unclear discussion leader role led to a lack of group discussions during activities.
Opportunities	Threats
1. Encouraging students to use English during activities. 2. Promoting group work through flexible role assignments.	1. Students felt pressured by time constraints during tasks. 2. Limited communication may affect mutual understanding within groups and with the instructor.

The SWOT analyses of both Thai and Chinese (Table 8 and 9) were used qualitatively to explain patterns observed in qualitative findings, while Thai students' weakness help account for the lack of significant gains, Chinese students' strengths correspond with their improved post-test performance, highlighting the role of classroom engagement and role participation in LC activities.

DISCUSSION

The finding suggest that the implementation of LCs was associated with the improvements in post-test among Chinese students. However, these results should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size and the test design to measure critical thinking skills that may have assessed broader reasoning abilities due to personal experience and cultural background interpretation. In contrast, Thai students showed a slight decrease in post-test scores, suggesting that LC activities do not guarantee the development of critical reading skills for all student groups. This finding contrasts with Anurit (2016, p. 81), who asserted that LCs were effective in fostering descriptive, analytical, and evaluative thinking among Thai university students.

The discrepancy may be attributed to various factors, including the instructor's teaching approach, the characteristics of Thai and Chinese students, cultural and cognitive differences, linguistic proficiency, engagement levels, and the design of the critical thinking skills test. For example, Chinese students demonstrated stronger engagement and role dedication, as evidenced by their proactive approach to information research and task completion. This greater preparation may have provided more opportunities to analyze information, exchange perspectives and justify their ideas during group discussion. Conversely, some Thai students struggled with confidence and group dynamics, which may have limited their active participation and reduced their ability to practice critical thinking which fully benefit from LCs. These observations, however, reflect the participants in this particular classroom context and should not be generalized to all Thai and Chinese students.

This result aligns with Sutrisno et al. (2018), who emphasized the importance of practical role assignment and management to ensure balanced participation. The more significant gains observed among Chinese students could be attributed to their embrace of roles as summarizers and connectors. Similarly, the findings are consistent with Karatay's (2017) study, which highlighted that LCs foster a collaborative social learning environment. However, the results suggest that Thai students may require additional practice and support to fully develop these skills.

When applying LCs to enhance critical thinking, their effectiveness depends on ensuring that all participants practice each role thoroughly. Failure to fulfill all roles may result in an incomplete thinking process during the LC activities, as reflected in the outcomes for the Thai student group. Thai students faced challenges with group member participation and consistency, compounded by frequent absences. Minh (2024) also emphasized the critical role of role differentiation in developing students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, effective

classroom management and teacher guidance, as suggested by Sutrisno et al. (2018), are essential to the successful implementation of LCs.

For the instructor's role, the researcher recommends that the instructor act as a coach rather than solely as a facilitator. This is because students still require clear guidelines and simultaneous practice to effectively participate in LC activities. At this stage, the instructor cannot yet allow students to conduct group activities entirely independently and may need to provide a more detailed explanation of the LC process. Additionally, incorporating a reflective observation process at the end of the activity could ensure that students gain both learning experiences and practical skills from the LC activities.

In response to Research Question 2, regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Thai and Chinese students in critical reading skills, the findings reveal that Thai students excelled in identifying facts from opinions, analyzing the logic of content, questioning for information, researching and analyzing information sources, and evaluating information. Similarly, Chinese students demonstrated strong abilities in analyzing the logic of content, questioning for information, identifying facts from opinions, evaluating information, and researching and analyzing information sources, in that order.

However, when critical reading skills were applied to real-life situations, both Thai and Chinese students faced notable challenges. Based on their responses, both groups struggled with questions related to the short story *Thank you, Ma'am* by Langston Hughes. These questions required students to make assumptions in various scenarios and engage in ethical decision-making at a personal level. For Thai students, question item no. 11 posed a significant challenge, with the percentage of correct answers dropping sharply from 33.30% in the pre-test to 0% in the post-test. This question presented a moral dilemma involving a young person attempting to steal a wallet and asked students to choose the most appropriate response from the following options; A) Call the police immediately, B) Try to understand why they did it and offer help, C) Yell at them and walk away, and D) Ignore the incident and continue on their way. The correct answer is B, which reflects an empathetic and constructive approach. Nonetheless, without requiring students to justify their choices, this item may have measured moral rather than critical thinking. Since one response could be reasonable depending on the explanation and experience, the result should be interpreted cautiously as a limitation of the test. However, most Thai students chose A, indicating a tendency to default to immediate and authoritative solutions. This pattern may reflect difficulties in transferring reading-based reasoning to situational decision-making context, rather than a limit of critical thinking. It is also possible that students interpreted these items culturally informed moral frameworks, which may not align directly with intended construction of the assessment. Similarly, Chinese students faced difficulties with questions requiring the critical evaluation of moral dilemmas. Question no. 12 was particularly challenging, with the percentage of correct answers decreasing significantly from 51.70% in the pretest to 26.50% in the post-test. This question asked "A neighbor's child often seems hungry and neglected. What action would you take?" The choices were A) Report the situation to child services, B) Avoid getting involved, C) Offer them food and talk to their parents, or D) Give them money to buy food. The correct answer is C, which combines practical support with empathetic dialogue. However, only 26.50% of

Chinese students selected this option in the post-test. Many students seemed to gravitate toward options A or D, likely viewing them as more immediate or practical solutions. This choice suggests that Chinese students may undervalue the importance of direct engagement and dialogue as a means to address complex issues effectively.

Nonetheless, although the instrument was designed to measure critical thinking skills, some test items may have assessed broader reasoning abilities rather than text-based alone, which may have influenced the students' performance. Therefore, the result should be interpreted cautiously and acknowledged as a limitation of the test design. Multiple-choice questions were only used because they allowed efficient administration and time constraints.

Overall, LCs show potential as a pedagogical approach for supporting students' engagement with critical reading process. Nevertheless, their effectiveness seems to be influenced by contextual variables such as cultural background, clarity of roles, and the degree of alignment between instructional activities and assessment instruments. The findings of this research highlight differences in learning strategies, critical thinking processes, and cultural background between Thai and Chinese students, as demonstrated through LCs activities.

In particular, the results suggest that the use of LCs in multicultural settings, such as Thai universities, requires thoughtful adaptation. Cultural factors significantly influence learning dynamics. For instance, Thai students often hesitate to express their opinions, reflecting their cultural emphasis on maintaining group harmony. In contrast, Chinese students exhibit greater proactivity and competitiveness in their learning, which fosters stronger task engagement. This observation aligns with the findings of Inree and Thongrin (2019, p. 26), who noted that LCs not only facilitated understanding of cultural diversity but also helped students overcome stereotypes. These benefits are particularly valuable in a multicultural classroom like the one in this study. Addressing these cultural dynamics is, therefore, essential for the successful implementation of LCs.

Qualitative observations further revealed that both Thai and Chinese students benefited from structured roles, such as connector and summarizer, which facilitated critical thinking. However, challenges emerged due to unclear understanding of specific roles, such as discussion leader, and limited use of English during group activities. For example, while Chinese students excelled in the summarizer role, their frequent reliance on their native language during discussions limited the development of their English proficiency. Similarly, Thai students often struggled with group cohesion due to limited confidence and frequent absences.

Traditional reading instruction, particularly in Asian educational settings, may need to be reimagined to support the collaborative and participatory nature of LCs. Wen (2024) emphasized the restrictive nature of traditional approaches, which limit student engagement and active participation. These limitations were evident in the Thai students' experiences during this study. To address such issues, enhanced scaffolding is recommended to help students fully understand their roles. Pre-activity training sessions or the integration of technology, as suggested by Chen (2020), could streamline LC activities and foster consistent participation.

Additionally, promoting an English-only policy during group work could address linguistic barriers, ensuring that students practice and improve their English proficiency throughout the process. Providing clear instructions for each role and emphasizing the use of English as the medium of communication could help mitigate role confusion and enhance the effectiveness of LC activities.

In conclusion, while LCs provide a promising framework for developing English critical reading skills, their successful implementation in higher education requires addressing challenges related to cultural diversity, role ambiguity, and language proficiency. Future research could explore modified LCs models that integrate technological tools and adapted role assignments to better accommodate diverse learner needs. These adaptations could further enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of LCs in multicultural educational settings.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study explored the use of LCs as an instructional approach to enhance critical reading skills in an English literature classroom comprising Thai and Chinese university students. The findings suggest that LCs were associated with improvements in the post-test performance among Chinese students, while comparable improvements were not observed among Thai students. These results indicate the influence of cultural and linguistic factors on the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies. The strengths of LCs, such as fostering collaboration, enhancing critical thinking, and encouraging active engagement, were evident in this study. However, challenges such as role uncertainty, limited English usage, and inconsistent group dynamics impeded the full realization of their potential. These findings align with existing literature that underscores both the effectiveness and the challenges of implementing LCs in diverse educational contexts.

However, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution due to the sample size limitations. Although efforts were made to ensure balanced representation for comparative analysis, the overall sample size was relatively small. While statistically significant score changes were observed, the practical significance of this change may be limited, and therefore should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of substantial skill development.

Regarding the implications for practice, instructors should consider cultural differences when designing LCs activities. Thai students may hesitate to express opinions due to cultural norms prioritizing group harmony, so additional support and scaffolding are needed to build confidence in discussions. Enhancing role clarity and language use can also improve the effectiveness of LCs. Encouraging the consistent use of English during activities can address language barriers and foster better communication. To mitigate the impact of restricted time for activities, educators could streamline LCs sessions by incorporating blended learning approaches or integrating digital tools that allow asynchronous collaboration. Lastly, professional development focused on role management, group dynamics, and multicultural teaching strategies can help instructors navigate the complexities of implementing LCs in diverse classrooms.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing literature on collaborative learning strategies in higher education. While LCs have proven to be a valuable tool for developing critical reading skills, their implementation requires thoughtful adaptation to address cultural, linguistic, and logistical challenges. By customizing LC activities to the needs of specific learner groups, educators can maximize their potential to promote active, critical, and engaged learning in multicultural classrooms.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample size, and although efforts were made to ensure balanced representation for comparative purposes, the limited number of participants restricts the strength of cross-group comparison. The study also revealed linguistic challenges, particularly among Chinese students who predominantly used their native language during discussions, which limited the potential for English language development and critical thinking skills. Similarly, Thai students' hesitation to actively participate and frequent absences disrupted group dynamics and continuity of activities.

To build on these findings, future research should consider employing large and more diverse participant groups across multiple institutions to enhance the generalizability of the findings and strengthen comparative analysis. Including students with varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds can provide deeper insights into the cross-cultural applicability of LCs.

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APPENDIX

Critical Thinking Pre-test

Please choose the answer you think is the most correct answer.

- 1. If you see an article online saying a new plant supplement can cure a sickness, what's the first thing you should do to check if it's true?**
 - A. Share the article with friends to see their opinions.
 - B. Check the author's qualifications and expertise in the field of herbal medicine.
 - C. Look for advertisements within the article.
 - D. Assume the information is true if it is published on a popular website.

- 2. A research paper on climate change is written by an author whose background is in economics, not environmental science. How should you evaluate this source?**
 - A. Trust the paper because it has a lot of data and charts.
 - B. Verify if the paper is published in a reputable, peer-reviewed journal.
 - C. Dismiss the paper entirely because the author is not an environmental scientist.
 - D. Assume the author is correct because they have a professional degree.

- 3. Statement: "The sky is blue because of the way the Earth's atmosphere scatters light from the sun." is**
 - A. Fact
 - B. Opinion
 - C. Interpretation
 - D. Belief

- 4. Statement: "Chocolate ice cream is the best flavor because it tastes the richest." is**
 - A. Fact
 - B. Opinion
 - C. Interpretation
 - D. Hypothesis

- 5. You read a news article about a recent scientific discovery, but the article provides limited details. What question would you ask to gain a deeper understanding?**
 - A. Who wrote this article?
 - B. How does this discovery impact existing scientific theories?
 - C. When was the discovery made?
 - D. Is this article long enough?

- 6. A report claims that a new educational method significantly improves student performance, but it doesn't explain the methodology used. What question would you ask to evaluate the validity of this claim?**
 - A. How many pages is this report?
 - B. Who funded the research for this educational method?
 - C. What specific ways and tools were used to see how much the students' performance improved?"
 - D. Where was this educational method developed?



- 7. You are reading an argument that claims all students should study music because it improves their math skills, citing a study with a small sample size of only 10 students. How would you analyze the logic of this argument?**
- A. Accept the claim because the study supports it.
 - B. Dismiss the argument because it discusses music.
 - C. Doubt the study's findings because the sample size is small.
 - D. Agree with the argument without considering the sample size.
- 8. A health article states that a new diet guarantees weight loss for everyone, but only provides subjective evidence from a few individuals. How would you analyze the logic of this statement?**
- A. Question the statement because personal stories are not enough to prove it works for everyone.
 - B. Accept the guarantee because it is stated confidently.
 - C. Ignore the article because it's about dieting.
 - D. Trust the diet because some people experienced weight loss.
- 9. A research paper claims that a new technology improves productivity by 50%, but the sample size of the study was only 10 people. How would you evaluate the information?**
- A. The information is accurate because the results show improvement.
 - B. The information is complete because it provides a percentage of improvement.
 - C. The information is relevant because it discusses new technology.
 - D. The information is questionable because the sample size
- 10. An advertisement states that a particular brand of toothpaste is the best according to a survey, but the details of the survey are not provided. How would you evaluate the information?**
- A. The information is correct because it says it's based on a survey.
 - B. The information is incomplete because it doesn't explain how the survey was done.
 - C. The information matters because it's about dental health.
 - D. The information doesn't matter because it's from an advertisement.
- 11. You find a young person trying to steal your wallet on the street. How would you respond to the situation?**
- A. Call the police right away
 - B. Find out why they did it and offer help
 - C. Shout at them and leave
 - D. Pretend it didn't happen and keep going
- 12. A man you know often makes mistakes but asks you for help. How would you assist him?**
- A. Help him out and be supportive without being critical
 - B. Say no to helping because of what he did before
 - C. Only help him if he agrees to do things differently in the future
 - D. Talk to him about his past mistakes



13. A teenager tells you he tried to steal because he needed money for something important.

What would you do?

- A. Give him some money to help with what he needs
- B. Tell him to find ways to earn money legally
- C. Tell his parents or guardians what happened
- D. Pretend you didn't hear and go about your business

14. If you had a difficult past and someone shared a similar struggle with you, how would you respond?

- A. Tell them about your own experiences to help them and give advice
- B. Keep your own past private and just listen to them
- C. Stay away from talking about personal things
- D. Encourage them to focus on the present and not think too much about the past

15. What would you do if someone who hurt you felt really sorry and asked for your forgiveness?

- A. Stay mad and don't forgive them
- B. Forgive them and give them another chance
- C. Forgive them, but keep your distance
- D. Ask for an apology first, then decide what to do

16. If a kid got the wrong idea about being sick, how would you help him feel better?

- A. Say "Don't worry" without explaining why
- B. Explain the diagnosis clearly and calmly
- C. Wait until a doctor arrives to address his fears
- D. Tell him he will be okay without giving more information.

17. Your friend believes he failed an important test but is too afraid to check the results. How would you support him?

- A. Check the results for him and relay the information
- B. Tell him the results don't matter and to forget about it
- C. Ignore the situation and hope he handle it on his own
- D. Encourage him to face his fears and check the results himself.

18. If your family member misunderstood a conversation and became deeply upset, what would you do?

- A. Let them stay upset until they calm down on their own
- B. Clarify the misunderstanding as soon as possible
- C. Avoid the topic to prevent further upset
- D. Wait for them to bring it up again

19. If you heard a kid explaining a medical problem wrong to another kid, what would you do?

- A. Tell them gently they got it wrong and give them the right information
- B. Don't say anything because it's not your business
- C. Wait for someone else to fix the mistake
- D. Laugh it off and talk about something else



20. Your friend is paralyzed by fear before a big presentation. What would you tell her?"

- A. Say it's normal to feel scared and everyone feels that way sometimes
- B. Practice with her to help her feel more confident
- C. Say she should skip it if she's too scared
- D. Ignore her fear and concentrate on what needs to be done