



## การใช้วงจรรวบรวมเพื่อพัฒนาความสามารถด้านพหุวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต Using literature circles to improve multicultural competence of university students

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### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสามารถทางด้านพหุวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต โดยใช้กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวมกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษชั้นปีที่ 2 คณะครุศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏอุตรดิตถ์ จำนวน 24 คน โดยการเลือกแบบเจาะจง (Purposive Sampling) ซึ่งกลุ่มตัวอย่างเหล่านี้คือ ผู้ที่ลงทะเบียนในรายวิชานิทานและวรรณกรรมสำหรับเด็กในภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2561 เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือ 1) แผนการสอนที่ใช้กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวม 5 บท 2) แบบทดสอบความสามารถทางด้านพหุวัฒนธรรม และ 3) การเขียนโต้ตอบวรรณกรรม สถิติที่ใช้คือ t-test ซึ่งนำมาใช้เพื่อเปรียบเทียบความสามารถทางด้านพหุวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษา ก่อนและหลังการใช้วงจรรวบรวมในห้องเรียนนิทานและวรรณกรรมสำหรับเด็ก ค่าเฉลี่ย และส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐานของคะแนนความสามารถทางด้านพหุวัฒนธรรม อีกทั้งการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาได้ถูกนำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ความสามารถทางพหุวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษา หลังจากการใช้กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวม การศึกษานี้พบว่าความสามารถทางพหุวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาดีขึ้นหลังจากการใช้วงจรรวบรวม ผลการทดสอบก่อนเรียนและคะแนนหลังเรียนของนักเรียนที่ได้รับกิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวมแตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 แสดงว่าการใช้กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวมส่งเสริมการพัฒนาความสามารถหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษา และนอกจากนั้น นักศึกษายังได้พัฒนาความสามารถทางพหุวัฒนธรรมที่พวกเขาได้รับเมื่อใช้กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวมถูกนำไปใช้กับห้องเรียนนิทานและวรรณกรรมสำหรับเด็ก นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่พัฒนาขึ้นในด้านความรู้เกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรม ส่วนประกอบและวัตถุประสงค์ของวัฒนธรรม บรรทัดฐานขนบธรรมเนียม ประเพณีและค่านิยมอีกด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** กิจกรรมวงจรรวบรวม; ความสามารถทางด้านพหุวัฒนธรรม; นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาบัณฑิต



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study how using of literature circles as a classroom activity can potentially develop multicultural competence of EFL university students. The sample consisted of 24 second-year English major students of the Faculty of Education, Uttaradit Rajabhat University, Thailand. The sample was selected by purposive sampling. The students were enrolled in Children's Literature course during their second academic year of 2018. The instruments used for this study were: five lesson plans that used a type of literature circles activity; multicultural competence self-evaluation test; and literature response journals. A t-test was used to compare the student's multicultural competence before and after the implementation of the literature circles in the classroom where the Children's Literature course was being taught. The mean and standard deviation of the multicultural competence scores and content analysis were used to explore the students' multicultural competence after the use of the literature circles. This study found that the students' multicultural competence improved significantly following the use of the literature circles. Therefore, the results of the pre-test and post-test scores of students who received literature circles activities were significantly different at the level of .05. This meant that the use of the literature circles activity promoted the development of students' multicultural competence. The students had developed their multicultural competence after the literature circles activity that was applied to Children's Literature classroom environment. Most of the students had developed in the "knowledge" aspect of multicultural competence. They showed they could better understand the concept of culture, its components, purposes, geography, economy, history, religion, norms, traditions and value systems.

**Keywords:** Literature Circles, Multicultural Competence, University Students

## Introduction

Learning a new language does not only involve learning the four key skills, namely reading, writing, speaking and listening, it is also important to gain, understand, and appreciate the culture of those who are from different countries. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) highlights the importance of raising intercultural awareness among language learners in order to appreciate and respect the differences between home and target cultures (Civelekoglu and Saka, 2017, pp. 39-52).

Nowadays, multicultural competence is a requirement in the fields such as literature, arts, health care, education and even business-especially for human resources, and governmental agencies. Multicultural competence refers

to the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures or with different social and economic backgrounds (Martin and Vaughn, 2007, pp. 2-8). Multicultural competence has also been defined as the ability in personal and professional contexts to interact respectfully and effectively with diverse individuals and groups in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth, and protects the rights and dignity of all (Vernooy and Harris, 2010). Multicultural competence can be defined as the awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for providing quality that can practice effectively in today's ethnically diverse society (Calvillo et al., 2009, pp. 137-145). According to Reisinger (2009), multicultural competence consists of four domains: cognitive, affective, behavioral, and



environmental. These domains allow individuals to effectively function, adapt, engage, and integrate into other cultures. The cognitive domain refers to knowledge and explains how individuals acquire and categorize cultural knowledge. The individual who has knowledge of a new culture and its people is able to function in this culture. The affective domain refers to emotions, feelings, and attitudes attained through knowledge. The individual who develops positive feelings and attitudes towards a new culture is able to adapt to a new culture. The behavioral domain refers to the abilities and skills related to specific cultural behavior. The individual who has specific abilities and skills is able to effectively engage in a new culture. The environmental domain refers to relationships between individuals and the environment. The individual who knows the cultural orientation of a new environment is able to fully integrate into this environment (Reisinger, 2009, pp. 377-383).

As many researchers have stated, the study of literature has many advantages in the context of a language learning classroom. Literature in a language classroom provides enough space for the learners to comment, justify and mirror themselves. By using literary text, the language class can become livelier and the teaching method may seem more motivating. According to various researchers, there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These include the aspect of having valuable and authentic material; providing cultural enrichment; fostering language enrichment and encouraging personal involvement (Van, 2009, pp.2-9). In university education, the study of English literature is considered as one of the essential subjects as part of the English curriculum. Literature courses improve students' cultural awareness in terms of how

language works in communication. It also enhances students' overall knowledge of culture and society (Khatib, 2011, pp. 1-8; Cheng, 2008, pp. 112-125).

One way to help students better understand the culture of the target language is through the use of literature circles, a type of peer discussion class activity first put forward by Harvey Daniels, an American teacher and researcher. As noted by Barrette et al. (2010), literature is one type of target language narrative that exposes students to comprehensible input, facilitating language acquisition. Literature circles is a teaching method in which students discuss the parts of the books they have read at certain intervals in groups formed according to the books they chose (Daniels, 2002). It is a combination of individual reading and collaborative learning (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Literature circles have many benefits for students. They not only develop their skills in terms of critical thinking, reading and writing, but also help students to engage in the culture of the target language. Students discuss and reflect on a wide variety of topics presented through literary texts. Teachers should consider implementing the use of literature circles in order to equip students with the cultural knowledge tools and subsequently encourage them to use these tools in order to more easily assimilate into the respective language community.

In this study, literature circles activity was used in language classrooms to foster students' multicultural competence. The researcher used literature circles as an active way to improve the reading comprehension of students, increase the communication between students and give individual students an active role in the learning process due to the fact that they had to focus more on the particular task assigned to them. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the use of literature



circles in EFL classrooms can raise multicultural competence of the students or not.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research was to study the multicultural competence of university students using literature circles, a type of classroom activity.

### **The scope of the study**

There are four main domains of multicultural competence: cognitive, affective, behavioral, and environmental domains (Reisinger, 2009, pp. 377-383). All of these domains allow individuals to effectively function, adapt, engage, and integrate into another culture. However, in the context of Thailand which students were in EFL classroom, the latter domain that is behavioral domain cannot be done because of the limitation in the context of Thailand and Thai classroom. In Thailand, the classroom environment is arranged for supporting Thai students which are from monoculture. Therefore, the behavioral and environmental domains were excluded in this study.

### **Research methodology**

This research used a single group experimental plan to study the development of multicultural competence through literature circles. The experiment was conducted with one sample group following a pretest-posttest design.

The research procedures were as follows:

1. The researcher surveyed the students' need to discover their interests in reading literary texts. Next, the students were introduced to the literature circles method to facilitate their understanding of the learning objectives and activities. A pre-test was conducted to measure students' multicultural competence before

using literature circles activity. Then, five lesson plans employing literature circles were implemented in the classroom over five weeks. The study was conducted over a period totaling 20 hours (split into 4 hours per week).

2. The researcher conducted 5 lesson plans using literature circles activities. The steps of teaching and learning activities were as follows:

**1) Warm up:** in the 1<sup>st</sup> week, book talk is employed. The researcher brought literary books to talk to the students by highlighting the interesting points of each book in order to give students a clear picture and to motivate the students to be more interested and wanted to read the books. However, in the rest 4 weeks, the warm up step was about book review in order to remind the students about the story they read.

This step was the reviewing of the content of the book that had been read and discussed last time

**2) Presentation and 3) Practice:** literature circles activity was used in this step. Groups of 6 students gathered together to discuss a piece of assigned literary texts by their roles. The six roles were discussion leader, summarizer, connector, word master, passage person, and cultural connector. In each role, they had their functions as follows:



**Table 1** Literature Circles' Role and their functions

Literature circles roles	Responsibilities
1. Discussion leader	Leads and controls the group to make the discussions flow, asks each of the group members one by one, retells and explains facets of the story based on each person's role. Then, the leader asks group member some open-ended questions about the story.
2. Summarizer	Briefly and completely summarizes the story to all members of the group at the beginning of the discussion session by focusing the group's attention on key points of the plot.
3. Connector	Finds connections between the text and the real world in which people live. The connector has to find some experiences from the group that relate to the story they read.
4. Word master	Finds important words, phrases or collocations in the story and explain the meanings of them to the members of the group but before defining them the word master may ask the opinions of the members about the chosen words or phrases with simple questions.
5. Passage person	Finds and brings to the group's attention important, interesting or difficult parts of the reading, parts that may be important for the story's events (the plot) or to explain the characters, to find and bring to the group's attention passages with especially interesting or powerful language.
6. Culture connector	Looks at the story and note both differences and similarities between the culture represented in the story and the group's own culture.

**4) Production:** the researcher applied literature circles worksheets to the class. The worksheets included six literature discussion roles. Students would complete their tasks with each role.

**5) Wrap up:** the researcher asked some groups to share their opinion after reading the story and also gave clarification or appraisal for what students had discussed.

3. Multicultural competence self-evaluation test was designed to assess the multicultural competence achievement before and after implementing the literature circles activity. The test consisted of 2 domains (Reisinger,

2009, pp. 377-383); cognitive and affective domain. Cognitive domain includes knowledge, awareness, language, and learning. Affective domain contains motivation, sensitivity, attitude, and personality traits. After conducting lesson plans and multicultural competence self-evaluation test, they were approved by three experts.

4. During the process, the students were assigned to read the designated story by focusing on their roles before attending the class each week. Moreover, the teacher asked the students to write a literary response journal to reflect upon the assigned texts. During the class, they were asked to form a discussion group to share their ideas and feelings of the short story based on their given roles.

5. After the implementation of literature circles, the researcher measured students' abilities using multicultural competence self-evaluation test to measure students' multicultural competence after using literature circles activity.

## Population and Sample

### 1. Population

The population was 300 English major students of the Faculty of Education, Uttaradit Rajabhat University, Thailand.

### 2. Sample

Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample for this research. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), purposive sampling techniques involved selecting certain units or cases which based on a specific purpose rather than random sampling. The study was conducted on 24 second-year English major students of the Faculty of Education, Uttaradit Rajabhat University, Thailand. The sample was selected by purposive sampling



because they have qualified to meet the qualification of the researcher. Moreover, they also had to enroll to study a course in Children's Literature as part of the second semester in academic year of 2018. These students had also studied three English language courses focusing on speaking, namely Oral Communication 1, 2, and 3. Moreover, they were able to hold discussions using English and show their feelings and personal experiences related to the literary texts they have read with peers effectively. They had also studied three writing courses, namely Grammar and Writing 1 and 2 and Paragraph Writing. Therefore, they could use written English to react, express, and create an emotional relationship between the texts and their own personal experiences.

### Research tools

The tools used in the research are as follows:

1. Five lesson plans using a type of literature circles classroom activity. Literature circles steps were as follows:

**Step 1)** The students were divided into some small groups during the sessions.

**Step 2)** Each group chose one literary book that had to be read within a period agreed. Then each member was assigned a temporary role.

**Step 3)** They met regularly to discuss what they had read.

**Step 4)** They rotated the role in every meeting. The lessons were approved by three experts who have been working in the fields of English language teaching for more than 10 years. Based on a need analysis, four literary texts were chosen by the students: "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou, "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller, and "Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad

All literary texts were approved by the same experts to ensure that the stories corresponded to the students' interest and made them want to discuss and respond. Furthermore, the level of English language used were appropriate to the students' language proficiency levels.

2. Multicultural competence self-evaluation test was given as pre- and post-tests and was comprised of 40 question items requiring a self-rating on a scale up to 5 (maximum). The test was approved by the same experts who were experts in the area of English literature and English teaching. After revising some of the multicultural competence self-evaluation test items in accordance with the experts' comments, the pilot multicultural competence self-evaluation was tested with 12 fourth-year English major students of the Faculty of Education, Uttaradit Rajabhat University. Following the pilot study, some parts of the multicultural competence self-evaluation test was adjusted and modified.

3. The assignment of personal literature response journals involved students writing on a piece of paper, stating their opinions about a text, including character's traits, the setting, plot, theme, or moral of the story. After reading and discussing the chosen literary text, students were instructed to reflect upon their feelings, emotions, and attitudes towards the story. The literature response journals were collected, transcribed and described to gather and find out more information about how the literature circles may have contributed toward multicultural competence development when applied to the EFL literature classroom.

### Data collection

The first stage of data collection was to survey the students to discover their interests in reading literary



texts and literary genres. This stage was conducted in the week before applying literature circles in the classroom

The data collection in this research was divided into before experiment, during experiment and after experiment. Before the experiment, students did the pre-test.

During the experimental period, the students wrote literature response journal in the week they were assigned to read the literary texts in order to reflect their cultural knowledge gain from the texts. They are assigned to write response journal in order to react and express their opinion and make relationship between the texts and their experiences. After the experimental period, the students did the post-test.

#### Data analysis

The quantitative method aided in providing descriptions of the study. The data was analyzed by mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The data was analyzed by using t-test in order to measure the progress of the students' multicultural competence before and after using the literature circles in the Children's Literature classroom.

#### Results

Analysis of the quantitative data from the multicultural competence test was employed to answer research question.

The pre- and post-test results of students who learned through the literature circles activity were different at a statistically significant level of .05. This indicates that implementing literature circles activity in the literature classroom could develop multicultural competence of EFL university students. The results were reported in Table 2.

**Table 2** Multicultural competence scores of EFL university students using literature circles activity

Using literature circles activity	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.		
Total scores of the multicultural competence score	117.40	20.569	155.60	17.009	-5.71	.00

\* Statistically significant at .05.

The overall scores of the test results using literature circles activity to promote multicultural competence achievement were compared before and after receiving the activity. It was found that the test scores of the students before using the literature circles activity averaged at 117.40 (S.D.=20.57). However, after using the activity to promote the multicultural competence achievement, the average score was 155.60 (S.D.=17.01)



The results of the pre-test and post-test scores of students who received literature circles activities were significantly different at the level of .05. This indicates that the use of the literature circles activity promoted the development of students' multicultural competence. The findings of previous studies also supported this research. Students exhibited improved knowledge when using the literature circles activity in the classroom. In addition, literature circles that involved reading activities to improve the students' ability to grasp, analyze, and summarize texts and develop their critical and reflective thinking were shown to be more effective than traditional text reading activities such as reading the text aloud or silently guessing unknown words from context and looking them up in the dictionary, analyzing texts using wh- questions, and analyzing the stylistic properties of texts. The use of



literature circles had a significant contribution to the improvement of students' reading comprehension. The implementation of literature circles increases student motivation towards reading and deepens comprehension (Irawati, 2016, pp. 179-192; Jacob, 2015; Briggs, 2010; McElvain, 2010, pp. 178-205; Wilfong, 2009, pp. 164-171).

Table 3 shows the 8 aspects of multicultural competence. These are knowledge, awareness, language, learning, motivation, sensitivity, attitude, and personality traits.

**Table 3** Comparison of differences in test results before and after using literature circles activity to enhance multicultural competence by aspect

The multicultural competence aspects	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t	P-value
		S.D.		S.D.		
1. Knowledge	14.40	3.44	18.45	2.42	4.761	.00
2. Awareness	15.05	3.12	19.30	2.13	4.165	.00
3. Language	14.20	3.56	19.55	2.64	5.135	.00
4. Learning	14.55	3.49	19.40	2.28	4.677	.00
5. Motivation	15.05	3.71	18.85	2.91	3.138	.00
6. Sensitivity	14.55	3.15	19.35	2.18	4.671	.00
7. Attitude	16.15	3.17	20.00	3.04	3.878	.00
8. Personality Traits	13.45	3.39	20.70	2.25	10.541	.00

\* Statistically significant at .05.

The results of the study found that, when comparing pre-and post-test results from the samples, using the literature circles activity could enhance the 8 aspects of multicultural competence. They had developed the personality traits aspect of multicultural competence. The average pre-test score was 13.45 (S.D.=3.39). After using literature circles in the literature classroom, the average post-test was score 20.70 (S.D.=2.25). It could be summarized that students could control their own actions concerning values, norms, and beliefs of one's home culture. The least development of multicultural competence was the knowledge aspect. The average pre-test score was 14.40 (S.D.=3.44). After using the literature

circles activity in the literature classroom, the average post-test score was 18.45 (S.D.=2.42). Even if their multicultural score in knowledge aspect was the least, this didn't mean that their knowledge has not been developed. Students had gained more knowledge about the concept of culture, its components, purposes, geography, economy, history, religion, norms, traditions and value systems.

As a result, when testing the differences before and after organizing these literature circles activities, it was found that the mean post-test scores were higher than the mean pre-test scores for all aspects of the multicultural competence with a statistically significant difference of .05. From the results, it is implied that organizing literature circles promotes multicultural competence development as the scores of the students improved in each area, resulting in more knowledge for the students.

Literature response journals were assigned to the students, allowing them to write down their feelings, emotions, and attitudes toward a story. The students were instructed to write a personal response after reading the literary text. This was done in order for them to reflect upon what they have learned as well as to note down their feelings, thoughts, and opinions on the literature circles. The journals could include students' opinions about a character's traits, the setting, plot, theme, or moral of the story. From a review of the literature response journals, it was found that the students were also able to generate their own ideas and contribute to thoughtful conversation about what they had read. This kind of practice help to develop thoughtful, competent, and critical readers (Brabham and Villaume, 2000, pp. 278-280).





### Conclusion and discussion

The results of the study showed that students were able to develop their multicultural competence they gained when the literature circles were applied to the study of literature in an EFL classroom setting. Most students saw improvements in the knowledge aspect. They understood the concept of culture, its components, purposes, geography, economy, history, religion, norms, traditions and value systems. They were also sensitive to cultural differences. Through literature circles, students completed conversational and written activities that exposed them to diverse responses and perspectives. This activity did not only help to improve their basic language and literacy skills, but also encouraged their development of multicultural competence, which is vital for helping learners live in a multicultural world.

The findings of other studies also support this conclusion. It could be concluded that using literature circles in the EFL classroom has many benefits. For example, Carrison and Ernst-Slavit (2005) found that literature circles help to strengthen students' literacy skills and boost confidence. In addition, Graham-Marr (2015) suggested that literature circles could improve students' vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, Balone (2015); Bedel (2016); and Anurit (2016) concluded that collaborative learning through literature circles could motivate students to participate in social interactions and enhance their critical thinking skills.

Research has shown that using literature circles as an instructional approach in the classroom had the potential to develop multicultural competence of university students. Students developed their multicultural competence in all aspects, namely knowledge, awareness, language, learning, motivation, sensitivity, attitude, and personality

trait. Literature circles were also proven to help students with their reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. From the analysis, literature circles are viewed as an additional teaching method for teaching literature in a classroom context. Literature circles enabled students not only read the text on a surface level but also take time to evaluate and relate the text to their own personal life.

### Recommendation

Some recommendations of this study were noted as following details. First, the literature circles activity was time consuming and the teacher will, therefore, need to ensure the learning activity is well-manage by allocating the time suitable for each procedure. Additionally, it is crucial that the teacher conduct a student needs analysis to ensure that the selection of literary texts is appropriate to the students' language proficiency levels and learning interests.

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