

# **Develop a Fostering Multicultural Competence through Literary Circles for Undergraduate Students**

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## **Abstracts**

The objective this study aimed to, 1) study the effectiveness of literary cycle activities in the development of multicultural competence, 2) study the opinions of students on the use of literary cycle activities to enhance multicultural competence. The sample consisted of 60 second-year English major students of the Faculty of Education, Uttaradit Rajabhat University. The sample was selected by purposive sampling. The students were enrolled in Children's Literature course during their second academic year of 2019. The instruments used for this study were: twenty lesson plans; multicultural competence self-evaluation test; literature response journals; interview form; and classroom observation form. A t-test was used to compare the multicultural competence's score of the two groups students. The classroom observation, in-depth interview, and literature response journal were interpreted and transcribed in order to gather the information by using content analysis. The results of the study were discussed into 2 parts; quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data analysis was done using t-test by comparing multicultural competence of the experimental group students learned with the control group students. The results of the multicultural competence scores of the experimental group students with the control group students were significantly different at the level of .05. The qualitative data analysis was done by the students' opinions towards the use of literature circle activities. The results found that students exactly knew what is literature circle and how it does. They also increased their cultural knowledge when using literature circle activities in their classroom.

**Keywords:** Fostering Multicultural Competence; Literature Circles; Undergraduate Students

## **Introduction**

Language is an integral part of culture (Nida, 2007 : 193- 199.). From this perspective, cultural teaching is an essential ingredient of language teaching. Language and culture are interconnected so that they complement each other. Learning a foreign language without learning the culture can only produce someone who speaks the language well but does not understand the social or philosophical context in which it exists (Choudhury, 2013 : 23). In this era of technology, globalization, immigration and mass media, it is even more imperative for EFL teachers to equip students with high level of multicultural competence. It may seem obvious to foreign language teachers that culture needs to be taught, but teaching culture in the classroom may not be as easy as one might have thought. In some cases, such as contexts where English is learned as a foreign language, the language classroom may be the only way where cultural contact occurs. Therefore, the language classroom environment should be made as open as possible to meaningful multicultural learning.

Numerous fields such as psychology, social work, counseling, nursing, and education are contributing to a growing body of literature on the topic of cultural competence. However, there is no universally accepted definition of this concept. Several interchangeable terms have been introduced to refer to cultural competence including cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, culturally responsive care, cultural brokering, cultural proficiency, and cultural encounters (Calzada, 2014: 31). Multicultural competence 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: 137-145; De Leon-Siantz and Meleis, 2007: 56; Giger and Davidhizar, 2007: 89). Multicultural competence consists of four domains: cognitive, affective, behavioral, and environmental (Reisinger, 2009:31). Multicultural competence is an ability to respect cultural context and act appropriately. A multiculturally competent learners must have knowledge about culture, have certain values and attitudes that include respect for diversity and emphasize helper self-awareness, and have the ability to integrate this knowledge and values/attitudes with helping skills (Campinha-Bacote, 1995 : 21; Weaver, 1999 : 9). One way to teach the culture of the target language to students is through the use of literature circles (LC), a type of peer discussion class activity put forward by Harvey Daniels, an American teacher and researcher.

Daniels (2002 : 6) believes the motive of literature circles is to combine literacy skills and strategies in a supportive social atmosphere with a non-threatening peer group. Students are free to express themselves, their connections, and their questions without worrying about the judgment of others. Literature circles make students enjoy and understand book so much more. They also provide for great opportunities to discuss books and get students want to read. Students are more likely to engage in purposeful and reflective discussions with literature circles (Clarke and Holwadel, 2007: 20-29 ; Long and Gove, 2003). Literature circle can help improving multicultural competence. The discussion about literature is clearly one of the main goals of using literature circles. Students will also be gaining reading comprehension and fluency skills. Literature circles also provide more exposure to literature by selecting the available books with purpose. Students learn how to adapt, engage, and integrate into another culture. They also acquire cultural knowledge of another difference culture. Students want to provide a variety of reading genres and topics to ensure each type of literary texts can have options of some interest to him or her. In addition, once the first book is read, students can even set up a system where the students decide which book to read next. This way, students can be exposed to material beyond what even you would have chosen. Schwebs (2019: 2) finds that the students' multicultural competence is strengthened through literature circles. The students help each other acquire knowledge and they engage in the life experiences of the book. The students share their readings, exchange opinions and use relevant vocabulary. The discussion seems to promote their oral competence.

In this study, literature circles are 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, increasing the communication between students, and giving individual students an active role in the learning process because they have to focus on the task given them. The samples in this study are selected on the basis of the knowledge, connection and judgment of the researcher. The participants have qualified to meet the qualification of the researcher. The qualified participants in this research have to study at least two courses of speaking and writing in order to discuss and write in English effectively. Moreover, the students have to enroll to study the Children's Literature course in the academic

year 2/2019. As a result, it is the convenience for the researcher to conduct the research. The duration of the experiment is 2nd semester, 15 weeks, 4 hours per week.

## **Objectives of the study**

This research focuses on developing the literature teaching method based on literature circle activities in order to enhance multicultural competence of EFL students. The purposes of the research are as follows:

1. To study the effectiveness of literary cycle activities in the development of multicultural competence.
2. To study the opinions of students on the use of literary cycle activities to enhance multicultural competence.

## **Methodology**

This study will conduct in the mixed methods research design. A significant characteristic of mixed methods research is its methodological multiplicity which often results in exceptional research compared to singular method research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004 : 14-26). Creswell and Plano (2011 : 12) conclude that the mixed methods research design focus on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. It can be concluded that mixed-methods design research is becoming essential in interdisciplinary dissertations. Therefore, the researcher conducted this research in the mixed methods.

### **1. Population and Sample**

#### **1.1 Population**

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

#### **1.2. Sample**

Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample for this research. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003 : 81), purposive sampling techniques involved selecting certain units or cases which based on a specific purpose rather than random sampling. The study was conducted on 60 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 2019. These subjects were the 2nd year students and they were divided into two groups (section 1 and section 2) automatically by the academic division of the university. The 30 students in section 1 are the experimental group and they will learn through the developed instructional model based on literature circle theory. The 30 students in section 2 are control group and they will learn through the regular instructional method. 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.

## **2. Research tools**

The tools used in the research are as follows:

1. Twenty lesson plans were created. They were divided into 10 lesson plans using literature circles and another 10 lesson plans using traditional teaching method. After that, 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: “Death of a Salesman” by Arthur Miller, “Heart of Darkness” by Joseph Conrad, “The Alchemist” by Paulo Coelho, and “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe. 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 comprised of 40 question items and 8 questions for written part. 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 24 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.

4. Interview form was used to gather qualitative data in order to examine the experimental group students’ opinions. The researcher used 5 questions to gather information about students’ opinions towards the use of literature circle activities.

5. The researcher used classroom observation form by conducting 20 times of the recorded classroom observation at the end of each lesson, divided into 10 times of experimental groups and 10 times of control groups in order to study the behavior of students, teaching and learning atmosphere, and problems in teaching and learning.

## **3. Data collection**

The data collection was divided into during experiment and after experiment. 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 were assigned to write response journal in order to react and express their opinion and make relationship between the texts and their experiences. Moreover, every week, the teacher recorded after teaching. After the experimental period, the students did the multicultural competence achievement test. The researcher then interviewed the students in order to get the information about students’ opinions towards the use of literature circle activities.

#### 4. Data analysis

The combination of the two approaches; quantitative and qualitative methods aided in providing descriptions of the study. The data analysis of this study was divided into quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data are analyzed by using t-test in order to compare the scores in multicultural competence achievement test of experimental group who learn by developed literature instructional model and control group. Moreover, the qualitative data analysis which was done by literature response journal, classroom observation form, and in-depth interview form were transcribed and described to gather and found out more information about the development of multicultural competence they gain as well as their opinion towards the use of literature circle activities.

#### 5. Research Procedures

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. Then, twenty lesson plans were created. They were divided into 10 lesson plans using literature circles and another 10 lesson plans using traditional teaching method. They were implemented in the classroom over ten weeks. The study was conducted over a period totaling 40 hours (split into 4 hours per week).

2. The researcher conducted 10 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 9 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 circle activities was used in this step. Groups of 6-7 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's roles and their function**

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.

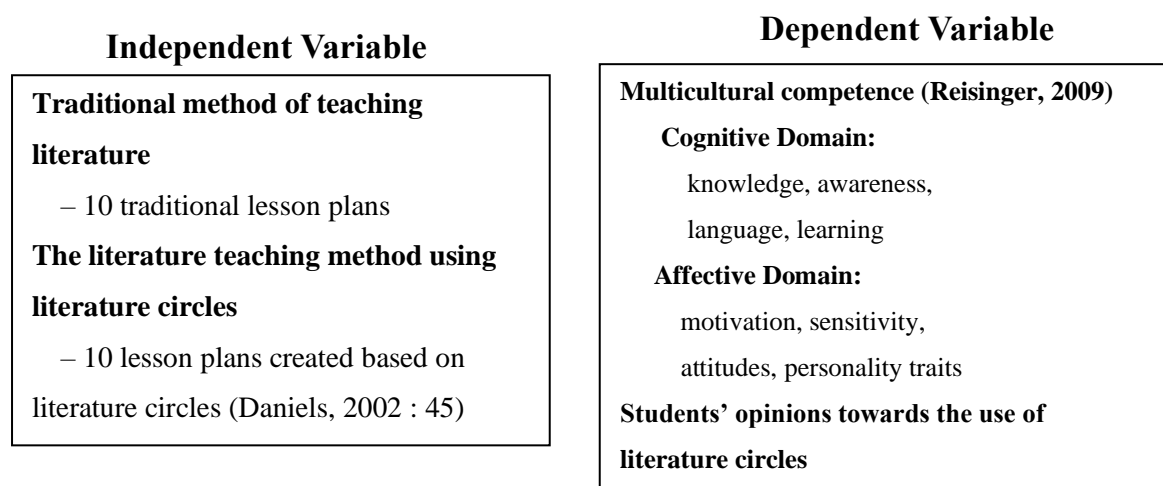
3. Multicultural competence self-evaluation test was designed to assess the multicultural competence achievement of two groups students. The test consisted of 2 domains (Reisinger, 2009, pp.377-383); cognitive and affective domain. Cognitive domain includes knowledge, awareness, language, and learning. 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 experimental group 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 experimental group students were interviewed to express their ideas, feelings, and emotions towards the using of literature circles classroom activity. Moreover, the researcher evaluated and compared students' multicultural competence scores between two groups students by using t-test.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is to apply literature circle activities in order to enhance multicultural competence of undergraduate students is shown in the figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framwork

## Results

The results of the study were discussed into 2 parts; quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

### The quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data analysis was done using t-test by comparing multicultural competence of students learned through literature circle activities with those who learned through traditional teaching method. The results were divided into two parts.

1. The results of the multicultural competence scores of students who learned through literature teaching method by employing literature circle activities with those who learned through traditional teaching method were significantly different at the level of .05. It was indicating that the students who learned by employing literature circle activities (the experimental group) get the higher scores on multicultural competence test than students who learned through traditional teaching method (the control group). The results were reported in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Multicultural competence scores of the experimental group students and the control group students**

Comparison	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	p
Students who learned through literature circle activities (Experimental group)	30	4.42	0.33	6.045 (df=51.136)	0.00
Students who learned through traditional teaching method (Control group)	30	3.77	0.49		

\* statistically significant at .05 level.

The overall scores of the multicultural competence test results using literature circle activities were compared multicultural competence scores of students who learned through literature teaching method by employing literature circle activities (the experimental group) with those who learned through traditional teaching method (the control group). It was found that the test scores of the experimental group students averaged at 4.42 (SD = 0.33). However, the multicultural competence average scores of the control group students was 3.77 (S.D. = 0.49). From these results, it led to the conclusion that the students who learned through literature circle activities had an average score more than the students who learned through traditional teaching method. From this result, it could be concluded that applying literature circles as an instructional approach in the classroom had the potential to create a positive and interactive environment. It was also essential to reading development as well as language development in order to promote reading, cooperative learning, critical thinking skills, and comprehension skills.

2. The results of the multicultural competence scores of the experimental group and the control group by aspect revealed that the control group students who learn by teaching the literature using the literature circle activities had the mean scores of the multicultural competence in all aspects more than the students learning by traditional teaching method. The results were introduced in the figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Comparison of the differences of mean score of multicultural competence of experimental group and control group students by aspect**

When comparing the difference of mean score of multicultural competence of experimental group students and control group students, the results of the study found that the students who learned through literature circle activities had an average score more than the students who learned through traditional teaching method. The average mean scores of experimental group students were more than the average mean scores of control group students in all aspects of multicultural competence. From the results, it was concluded that using the literature circle activities could enhance the 8 aspects of multicultural competence of the students who learned through literature circle activities (experimental group).

From the quantitative data analysis, it could be concluded that using literature circle as an activity in the classroom could help students to develop multicultural competence. Most students improve 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 qualitative data analysis**

The qualitative data analysis was done by the writing part of the multicultural competence, literature response journal, classroom observation form, and in-depth interview form were transcribed and described to gather and found out more information about the development of multicultural competence they gained when literature circle activities was applied to the literature EFL classroom.

1. The results from writing part about the multicultural competence students was concluded that after using literature circle activities in EFL classroom, students had raised cognitive domains of multicultural competence in the knowledge aspect most. It meant that after using literature circle activities in EFL classroom, students had gained general knowledge about culture including the concept of culture, its components, purpose, various domains, and value systems, how values are learned, frameworks for understanding and comparing different cultures, the influence of cultural differences on human behavior, culture shock and conflict, perceptions and stereotyping. Another part of writing about multicultural competence that students gained called affective domain (emotional or feeling domain, or attitude domain). They raised in attitude aspect most which meant that they had positive feeling towards a new culture and people who come from different cultural background. They were also interested in, accept, and respect for other different traditions, history, religion, norms, value systems and ways of doing things.

2. The analysis of literature response journal led to the conclusion that students most improved in sensitivity aspect after using literature circles in the classroom. It showed that the experimental group students had sensitive feeling to cultural differences. They felt enjoyable, excited, and sympathetic to the character in this story. They had a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between their own culture and other different culture. They recognized that differences between cultures based on many factors including religion, race, ethnicity, gender, education, nationality, politics, and geographic origin. They also knew and respected for these differences that were a key in the development of cultural skills.



3. The students' opinions towards the use of literature circle activities to enhance multicultural competence summarized that students exactly knew what is literature circle and how it does. They also increased their cultural knowledge when using literature circle activities in their classroom. They got many interesting knowledge and information from different cultures. They also learned a variety of cultures that can be applied in their life. Their feeling towards literature circle activities was that they like it and they thought it was suitable to use literature circle activities in literature's classroom. They thought it will give students a better analytical skill and a deeper understanding of the story. Moreover, if they were a teacher, they would use literature circle activities in their classroom in the future because it allowed students to practice and develop the skills and strategies of good readers. Using literature circle activities in the classroom, students not only increased English language skills, cooperative learning, or critical thinking but also, they were satisfied with this activity as well.

4. The analysis of classroom observation showed that the experimental group students were interested in teaching and learning. They were also ready to learn and well prepared to read the assigned story before class. They were willing to comment thoroughly and had good interactions between learners together. They expressed their own opinions freely. They analyzed the literary elements in the story such as characters, situation, and conflict by offering variety options. They sometimes linked to other stories they had ever read. On the contrary, most of control group students were quite bored in teaching and learning. Most of them didn't read the assigned story before class. In their writing, they wrote quite short literature response journals. They expressed just few sentences of their own opinions. The journals were mostly in narrative writing. They just summarized the idea from the story instead of analyzing the literary elements. The students were not interested in teaching and learning. They didn't pay attention to read the story. They did not like to give their comments and they didn't have good interactions with other learners in class. The teaching and learning atmosphere of the experimental group was in a two-way communication. This meant that students had good interactions with teacher and classmates. They accepted each other's opinions including teacher with admiration. The students were also interested to share their additional viewpoints. While the teaching and learning atmosphere of control group students was in one-way communication. Students had no interaction with teacher and between students together. Most of the students weren't interested in expressing their opinions. They didn't like to search for answers or analyze the story themselves.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

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. The multicultural competence of the students improved in all aspects. This meant that 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. Moreover, the multicultural competence ability of the learners was the result of the use of literary circle activities in the literature's classroom. This showed that this activity can strengthen the students' multicultural competence ability. 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 : 93-113) found that literature circles help to strengthen students' literacy skills and boost confidence. In addition, Graham-Marr (2015 : 1- 6) suggested that literature circles could improve students' vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, Balone (2015 : 21); Bedel (2016 : 11); and Anurit (2016 : 65) 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.

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## Recommendation

Some recommendations of this study were noted as following details. First, the literature circle activities 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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