

The Influence of Library, Archive, and Museum Collections on the Cultural Competence of Undergraduate Humanities Students in Thailand¹

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Library, Archive, and Museum (LAM) digital collections on the cultural competence of undergraduate humanities students in Thailand. Through a survey approach, the study evaluates how often students engage with these collections, the types of resources they access, and how these engagements may enhance their cultural insight. The results show a positive but modest correlation between the frequency of engagement with digital collections and cultural competence metrics. Qualitative data reveals both the benefits and challenges encountered by students in using these resources. This study contributes to an understanding of how LAM collections may promote cultural competence in higher education and highlights the need for improved accessibility and support for students.

Keywords: Cultural Competence, Digital Collections, Humanities Undergraduates

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อิทธิพลของคอลเล็กชันของห้องสมุด หอจดหมายเหตุ และพิพิธภัณฑ์ ที่มีต่อ สมรรถนะทางวัฒนธรรมของนิสิต/นักศึกษาศาขามนุษยศาสตร์ ระดับปริญญาตรี ในประเทศไทย¹

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาอิทธิพลของคอลเล็กชันดิจิทัลของห้องสมุด หอจดหมายเหตุ และพิพิธภัณฑ์ ที่มีต่อสมรรถนะทางวัฒนธรรมของนิสิต/นักศึกษาศาขามนุษยศาสตร์ ระดับปริญญาตรี ในประเทศไทย ด้วยวิธีวิจัยเชิงสำรวจ เพื่อประเมินความถี่ที่นิสิต/นักศึกษาเข้าถึงคอลเล็กชันดิจิทัลว่ามีมากน้อยเพียงใด ประเภทของทรัพยากรอะไรที่นิสิต/นักศึกษาเข้าถึง และศึกษาการมีส่วนร่วมของนิสิต/นักศึกษาที่คอลเล็กชันดิจิทัลอาจช่วยเพิ่มความเข้าใจทางวัฒนธรรมได้อย่างไรบ้าง ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นถึงความสัมพันธ์เชิงบวกที่ไม่มากนักระหว่างความถี่ของการมีส่วนร่วมกับคอลเล็กชันดิจิทัล กับตัวชี้วัดสมรรถนะทางวัฒนธรรม นอกจากนี้ ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพยังเผยให้เห็นทั้งประโยชน์และความท้าทายที่นิสิต/นักศึกษาประสบเมื่อใช้ทรัพยากรเหล่านี้ การศึกษานี้มีส่วนช่วยให้เข้าใจว่าคอลเล็กชันดิจิทัลของห้องสมุด หอจดหมายเหตุ และพิพิธภัณฑ์ สามารถส่งเสริมสมรรถนะทางวัฒนธรรมในการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาได้อย่างไร และเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการปรับปรุงการเข้าถึงและการสนับสนุนนิสิต/นักศึกษา

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Introduction

Cultural competence is increasingly recognized as a crucial skill in today's globalized world, especially within higher education. Humanities students, who frequently engage with diverse cultural materials, are expected to develop this competence to succeed in their studies and future careers. Library, Archive, and Museum (LAM) digital collections offer students access to a wide range of cultural resources that can enhance their cultural awareness and sensitivity (Vårheim et al., 2020).

This study investigates the correlation between the use of LAM collections and the development of cultural competence among humanities students in Thailand. Students in the humanities, specifically, are required to cultivate cultural competence as they frequently engage with materials that embody diverse cultural perspectives. LAM digital collections serve as a significant resource for students, affording access to a vast array of cultural materials that can augment their cultural awareness and sensitivity. This investigation seeks to analyze the correlation between the utilization of LAM digital collections and the enhancement of cultural competence among undergraduate humanities students in Thailand. The objective of the study is to comprehend the frequency with which students utilize these collections, the types of materials they access, and how these activities may potentially influence their cultural competence.

Literature Review

Cultural competence in higher education refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and appreciate cultural differences, which is particularly important in humanities disciplines. LAM digital collections offer an array of resources that can support this competence by providing access to a wide range of cultural and historical materials (Sánchez-Caballé et al., 2020). For instance, digital archives may include rare manuscripts, artworks, and ethnographic records that are invaluable for understanding different cultures. In a library, archive, and museum perspective, humanities undergraduates' cultural competence is significantly influenced by their engagement with digital collections, enhancing their understanding and digital skills. Integrating digital collections into humanities education fosters inclusivity and promotes cultural competence among students.

Digital humanities have transformed knowledge access and dissemination, creating new opportunities for humanities students and faculty. LAM organizations are essential for curating digital collections crucial for humanistic research and cultural competence development. The culture of digital scholarship in academic libraries facilitates the integration of digital resources into educational practices, enhancing student engagement with diverse cultural materials. LAM organizations prioritize professional development to enhance their professionals' cultural competence, benefiting student interactions through informed teaching and learning. LAM organizations also serve as "learning laboratories," providing access to digital collections vital for developing digital literacy and cultural understanding. Collaborative efforts between LAM services and instructors are essential for bridging traditional and digital learning (Vårheim et al., 2020).

However, previous research has shown that not all students are aware of or capable of effectively using these resources (Vodă et al., 2022). Factors such as digital literacy, familiarity with digital interfaces, and the perceived relevance of these resources can influence their usage. Additionally, there are disparities in the usage patterns among students from different academic

disciplines, with humanities students potentially being less proficient in navigating digital collections compared to their peers in fields like computer science.

Moreover, for research studies on digital collections in the Thailand context in the past. There is related work is the study of Sukmanee & Manmart (2018) about State and Problems of Digital Collection Management of University Libraries in Thailand the result shown that digital collection management in the Thai university libraries comprised collection acquisition policy, the establishment of an operation unit responsible for the acquisition, its personnel, budget, and its management model, collection storage, and standard for digital collection management. The collection acquisition process consisted of acquisition, its storage, standard and metadata for cataloging, access and searching, application technology, and data maintenance. And there were 5 problems of digital collection management in the university libraries: 1) personnel's lacking of experiences, electronic expertise, and copyright law knowledge, and the high turnover rates of personnel, 2) insufficient budget for journal subscription due to the increasing subscription rates, no negotiation power with journal publishers and subscription agencies due to unfavorable working conditions, supporting budget, staff development, and technological differences, 3) lacking of main database for storing and accessing digital academic data for networking and instability of the Internet, 4) most of the software could not function and were not compatible with the university working system, 5) users' statistics of database use were not self-retrievable, and the reduction of the digital collection users.

Therefore, the management of digital collection and the result to concern of the problem of the management of digital collection leads to the students and users to increase their use of digital collection in Thailand context in the future.

Methods

A survey was conducted to investigate the relationship between the use of digital collections and the development of cultural competence among humanities students in Thailand. The survey targeted 182 undergraduate students enrolled in humanities programs across several Thai universities. The survey instrument⁷ employed for the survey incorporated both closed-ended and open-ended inquiries. The closed-ended questions utilized 5-point Likert scales to quantitatively assess the cultural competence of undergraduate students, soliciting information regarding their capacity to comprehend and engage with diverse cultures, their valuation of cultural diversity, as well as their familiarity with an array of cultural practices. The cultural competence was transformed into twenty-one statements, where students expressed their level of agreement (Lopes-Murphy, 2013).

Additionally, the survey encompassed questions pertaining to the frequency of students' engagement with digital collections (e.g., "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Very often," "Always") and the specific types of materials they accessed (e.g., "Manuscripts," "Photos," "Rare books"). The open-ended inquiries facilitated students in articulating their experiences with LAM digital collections and the various

⁷ The survey instrument is certified by Office of the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects: The Second Allied Academic Group in Social Sciences, Humanities and Fine and Applied Arts. No.191/67 (Research Project Number 670117)

impediments encountered. This section of the survey yielded qualitative data that contributed to elucidating the quantitative results. The survey was administered to 173 undergraduate humanities students, who were intentionally selected to represent a diverse array of academic majors in the humanities.

The quantitative data underwent analysis through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to encapsulate the frequency of digital collection utilization, the categories of materials accessed, and the cultural competence scores among the student population. The qualitative data were examined by discerning recurrent themes within the students' responses concerning their interactions with and challenges faced in relation to LAM digital collections.

Results

Quantitative Results

The questionnaire respondents are mostly concentrated in the age range of 19-22, with a few older respondents. It seems primarily to consist of students majoring in Library and Information Science. Most of them are in their 2nd or 3rd year of study. The quantitative data analysis revealed that most students indicated infrequent use of LAM digital collections, with 42.8% reporting "rarely" and 36.4% indicating "sometimes," whereas a smaller fraction utilized them "very often" (17.3%) or "always" (3.5%). The most accessed categories of collections comprised manuscripts, photographs, and rare books. The correlation established between the frequency of digital collection usage and cultural competence scores was weak yet positive ($r = 0.147$). This finding implies that a certain degree of association exists between the frequency with which students engage with these collections and their cultural competence; however, the relationship is not particularly robust (see Fig.1). Furthermore, the demographic variables like age, year, and major show very weak correlations with cultural competence scores in this survey.

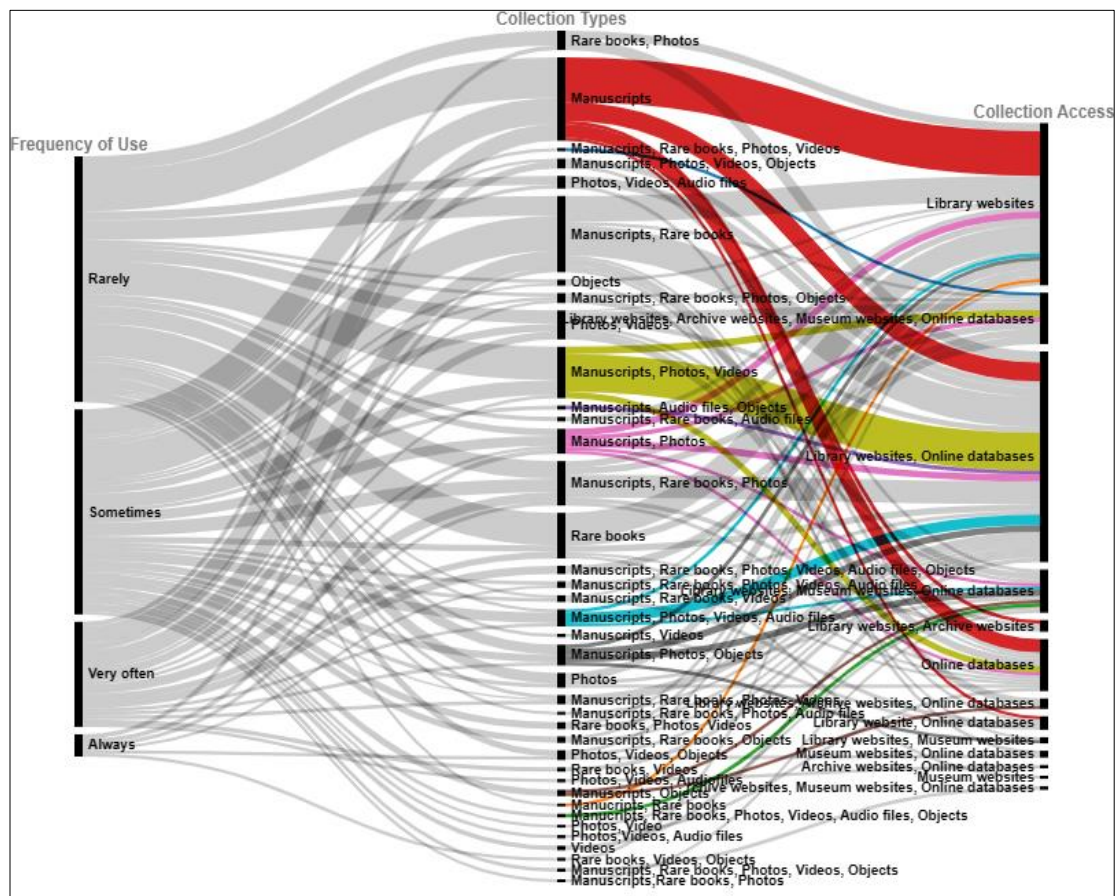


Fig. 1. The correlations among frequency of use, collection types, and collection access of undergraduate humanities students.

The analysis also reveals that several statements have a strong correlation with cultural competence scores. The top five predictors include Statement 10 “I tend to observe people different from me and reflect on how they make me feel.” ($r=0.6829$), Statement 4 “When I meet people different from me, I compare how my cultural identity is similar to theirs.” ($r=0.6808$), Statement 11 “I think of myself as a culturally competent person.” ($r=0.6604$), Statement 9 “Classroom activities that involve interaction with people from other cultures help a person develop cultural competence.” ($r=0.6422$), and Statement 13 “I like to tell people from other cultures about my own culture.” ($r=0.6286$), respectively. These statements are highly correlated with cultural competence scores, suggesting they may be significant predictors of a participant's cultural competence. Meanwhile, other statements show moderate or low correlations (around 0.5) with the cultural competence scores (see Fig.2).

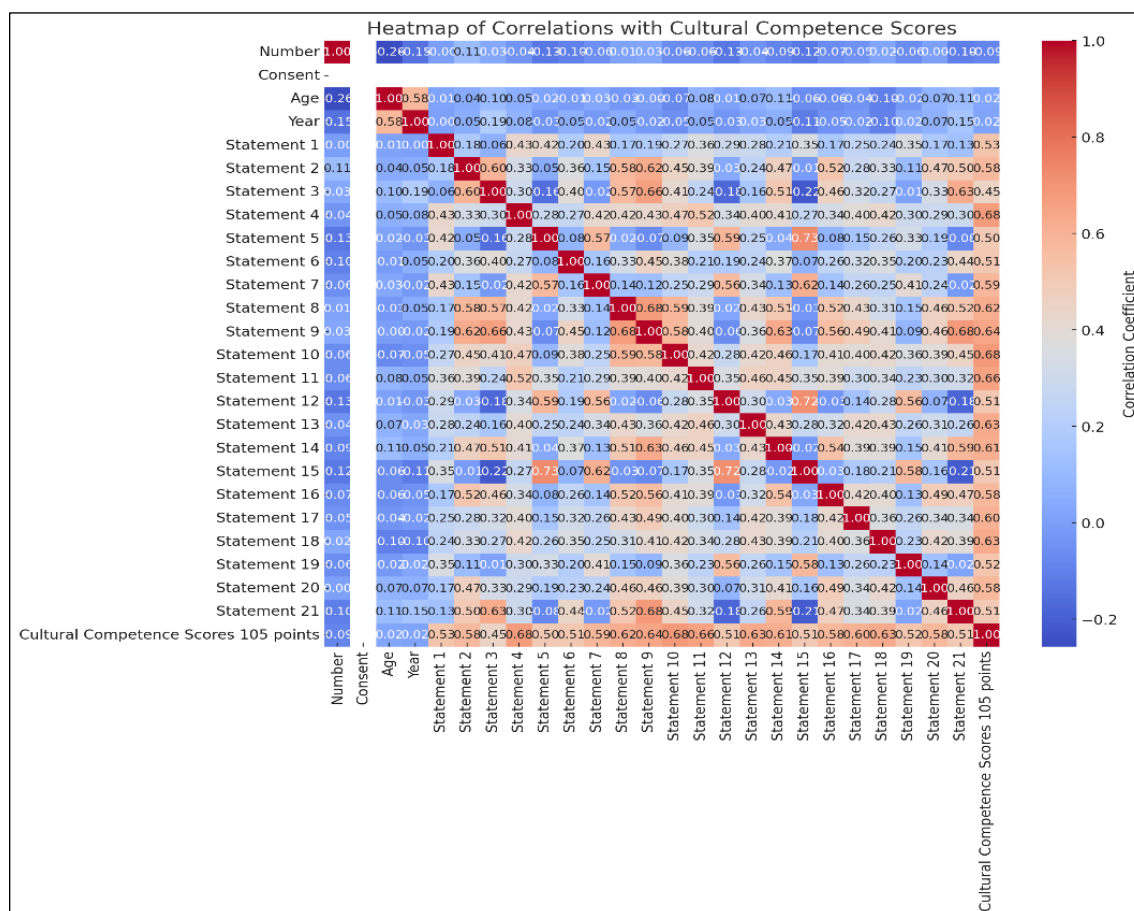


Fig. 2. The twenty-one cultural competence statements correlated with cultural competence scores.

Qualitative Insights

Students reported that while LAM collections provided valuable cultural insights, they also faced challenges such as limited accessibility and difficulty in finding relevant resources. These challenges suggest the need for better support and guidance in using LAM collections effectively, such as restricted access to essential materials, technical difficulties including slow internet connectivity, and complications in navigating digital platforms. Furthermore, some students conveyed a desire for an expanded range of language options to facilitate the accessibility of these collections for non-native speakers.

Conclusion and discussions

The empirical results of the thorough investigation carried out in this study categorically demonstrate that while the LAM collections have the potential to significantly enhance the cultural competency of students enrolled in humanities courses, the overall effect of these interactions is still relatively small and, thus, restricted in scope. This observation suggests that even though students are actively participating in and engaging with these diverse collections, there is still room for improvement, particularly in terms of how well these resources support students' nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex web of diverse cultures that makes up our global society. The critical importance of these collections as priceless educational resources that merit further investigation and utilization within

academic curricula is further reinforced by the found positive correlation between the degree of student engagement with these collections and the development of cultural competence. However, the issues with accessibility and the availability of adequate user support highlight the crucial flaws and gaps that must be fixed right away in order to properly utilize the potential of these collections.

To ensure that their collections are not only made available to a wide audience but are also carefully customized to suit the unique needs of undergraduate students pursuing their educational goals, organizations under the LAM umbrella are finding that it is increasingly necessary to critically reevaluate and carefully reconsider their strategic approaches in the context of Thai higher education. Included in this reevaluation process should be efforts to enhance digital access to collections, offer comprehensive training programs or student-specific support systems, and work together to make these priceless assets easier to use and navigate overall. Furthermore, emphasized by the notion that obtaining cultural competency necessitates much more than only being exposed to a broad range of resources.

It is also imperative that LAM organizations carefully evaluate and analyze the specific kind of materials that are most effective in fostering and advancing students' cultural competency. With Thailand's rich and diverse cultural landscape, collections must be carefully selected to incorporate local, regional, and global cultural objects and materials, all of which should have a profound impact on the lived experiences of the students interacting with them. Additionally, it is more important than ever to offer teaching tools and resources that let students carefully evaluate and interpret these varied sources in order to foster a deeper and more fulfilling engagement with the vast body of cultural knowledge that is accessible.

The study's conclusions, then, emphasize both the enormous potential of LAM collections and their intrinsic limitations in terms of promoting cultural competency within the framework of humanities education. For LAM organizations to maximize the educational value that can be derived from these collections, accessibility and the establishment of robust support mechanisms must be given first priority. Additionally, as college students navigate their academic journeys, they must ensure that their collections align with the evolving requirements and expectations of their student body. In order to improve students' cultural competency, future research should concentrate on pinpointing the precise resources that complement instructional tactics the most effectively. Additionally, it will undoubtedly be advantageous and fruitful for subsequent scholarly studies to examine how LAM institutions in Thailand might.

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Disclosure of Interests

The author has no competing interests.

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