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# Critical Consciousness Development through Teaching English Reading: A Context of EFL Students in Thailand's Northeastern Area

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## ABSTRACT

EFL reading in non-English environments often expose students to texts from different cultures. However, reading comprehension alone is inadequate to prepare the students to be critical readers, due to different sociocultural and sociopolitical factors that affect interpretations of EFL students who should be prepared with critical perspectives to read more meaningfully and to be able to demonstrate a desire to challenge and transform perceived socio-political inequities and oppressive structures. This study aimed to investigate the extent of enhanced reading ability and to develop critical consciousness by using critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction. The participants were 30 students majoring in English at a university located in Northeastern part of Thailand. The data were collected by using a self-evaluation questionnaire, reading comprehension pretest and posttest, field notes, students' reflective journals, and interview transcripts. The findings show an increase of the participants' reading comprehension abilities, moving beyond the lexical

comprehension level, and being able to perform critical literacy through reading to writing practice. Also, their developed critical consciousness was manifested through their awareness of social relations and power, their reflections on ongoing circumstances and living systems, and their action against injustice. The findings suggest aspects of critical literacies that challenge normative practices of reading instructions implemented in hegemonic spheres.

**Keywords:** critical dialogue, reading instruction, critical consciousness

## Introduction

A number of studies on reading ability development are greatly concerned with learners' comprehension of texts through linguistic competence by various reading techniques (Dolba et al., 2022; Oranpattanachai, 2023). However, a sole focus on linguistic competence alone is not sufficient to turn EFL students into critically aware readers as they possess different sociocultural and sociopolitical backgrounds which can influence their textual interpretation. Students often adopt passive learning methods (Larking, 2017; Yulianto, 2015) or what Freire (2002) calls 'banking education', where teachers define themselves as knowledge givers and assign the role of knowledge receivers to the students. The repetition of such learning models tends to exclude learners' cultures and keep them silent in classroom settings, the sites that students' voice should be heard.

Such a banking education seems to be a practice silently situated in a community university in the Northeastern part of Thailand. The students in this area are from multi-ethnic groups such as Phu Thai, Kaloeng, So, Yo, or Lao who carry distinctive indigenous languages, ways of living, and social contexts. According to Alexander and McCargo (2014) and Petchkham (2018), individual Northeastern ethnic groups with different sociocultural landscapes impact students' behavior and performances in the classroom on account of their sociocultural and socioeconomical experiences.

Within this context, reading and writing in English has been mandated as a core course for EFL students. The mode of instruction usually conforms with English teaching based on normative standards within the domain of linguistic practices under English native speakers' norms. The integration of the lesson and students' funds of knowledge which are distinctive from mainstream knowledge presented in common textbooks, has not been considered when designing classroom instruction. As such, the students retain a reluctance to meaningfully interrogate the texts but rather

tend to accept ideas and concepts as presented. Therefore, a bi-directional relationship between linguistic practices and social practices needs to be nurtured in EFL classrooms, so that the students are aware of how linguistic hegemonic practices are forefront in texts. To attain this purpose, students should engage with critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction to become aware of the dominant power in texts in connection to local social practices.

However, few studies in relation to EFL reading in non-English settings have investigated teaching approaches that conceptualize critical consciousness into local classroom practices (Shimbo & Tendo, 2022). To reach that end, reading instruction should be incorporated with critical dialogue, a teaching tool for the students to unveil the dominant discourse, power, and ideologies prevailing in the texts by reflecting their perspectives on injustice and step forward within trajectories (Freire, 2002).

Accordingly, this study aims to develop students' critical consciousness through reading instruction and assessing students' self-evaluation on developing their critical consciousness through critical dialogue (Shor & Freire, 1987), four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2015), and three-factor critical consciousness (Schneider, 2019). The first two elements help the students to construe power and ideologies representation in reading texts, the third element identifies students' ability to acknowledge injustice and act upon such situations, and all elements correlated to contribute to 4-stage-reading instruction (pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading, and beyond-reading) (Rungwaraphong, 2018). To explore if reading instruction with critical perspectives could offer alternatives to students, we emphasized the following two research questions:

1. To what extent do participants develop their reading ability through critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction?
2. How can the participants' critical consciousness be developed by critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction?

## Review of Literature

### Text Biases and Critical Practices in Classrooms

Reading has been defined as a decoding process to understanding of texts as a tool to extend the area of knowledge by engaging bottom-up models (Stanovich, 1980), top-down models (Tierney & Pearson, 1994), and interactive models (Rumelhart, 1980) which led to supportive arrangements to develop reading comprehension ability by using scaffolding stages; pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading, and beyond-reading (Rungwaraphong, 2018). However, reading comprehension alone can distort readers' interpretations of the texts by trapping them in one-sided information

without allowing them to raise questions (McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2004). Findings across studies indicate that biases in texts influence students' perceptions to the world outside the classroom. These studies included the explorations into stereotyping, invisibility, and gender-biased norms (Ndura, 2004; Ragusa, 2013). As McLaren (2005) posits, information and knowledge are not neutral – they are always socially constructed.

This current study was conducted through the concept of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2002) where the revised pedagogy requires learners to shift from being passive to active learners asking questions and comprehending the meaning of the textual discourses. In recent decades, critical inquiries have been considered to studies conducted in EFL classrooms as concepts to cultivate the students with a duality of critical perspectives and reading ability.

Critical literacy and critical dialogue have proven useful in Taiwanese classrooms, exploring the implementation of critical literacy through reading instruction (Huang, 2011; Ko, 2013). Students effectively identify social aspects and hidden messages, emphasizing how texts are constructed with literal meanings and subtle working ideologies. This concept is supported by Liu (2017), where Chinese university students, by engaging with a critical approach, improved their ability to perceive reality and be aware of biased language. Additionally, Cui and Teo (2023) suggest the critical literacy practices can enhance critical thinking skills, with dialogic moves fostering critical perspectives on given points in texts.

Despite the fact that the existing studies have noted the efficacious approach of critical practices, the extent for implementing critical literacy for critical consciousness development still remain scant in tertiary education (Ko, 2013). As noted by Wenger (1998) who proposed the concept of 'situated experiences', the reading materials should also be regarded with students' needs, problems, and interests, so that the students would interpret the texts with their deeper understanding. This accords with, the critical literacy model (Lewison et al., 2015), the four dimensions to drive the students' reading ability to meet the text critique stage. Disrupting the commonplace involves students' perceptions to subjects with the ability to reconsider them with new lenses. Interrogating multiple viewpoints requires the students to build effort of seeking a variety of viewpoints from various positions. Focusing on sociopolitical issues drives the students to move from personal-oriented level to investigate the relation of language and power in sociopolitical systems (Lewison et al., 2002). Finally, taking action to promote social justice encourages students to engage in transforming social conditions from dominant practices to be more democratic in their own ways.

In the reading ability development, cognitive domain (Anderson et al., 2001) display the array of skills from lower-order thinking to higher order thinking. The domain consisted of remembering, understanding, applying,

analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The lower-order thinking skills encompass the ability to recognize and comprehend the information without complex thinking systems. Whereas, the higher-order skills thinking focus on the ability to analyze information, interpret, and critique information to co-construct new knowledge based on the information in the texts.

### Critical Consciousness

Conscientization or conscientização (in Portuguese), was developed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who described critical consciousness as the convergence of reflection and action on social conditions. Consciousness has been classified into four states. First, intransitive consciousness is described as non-critical action (Freire & Macedo, 2005) or one's inability to critically understand the social issues at the moment. Second, semi-intransitivity refers to the state where one is able to see the logic and rationale of events but is not able to identify the problem therein. Third, naïve transitiveness explains the primal stage of critical consciousness which one carries the sense of being critical but somewhat relies on brief judgement with the lack of considering forensic causality. Finally, critically transitive consciousness is defined as the forensic understanding of inequality system and acting against it. Recent studies have located the extent of critical consciousness in higher education regarding global inequalities, oppression, or social justice. The mutual focus among the studies aim to create frees space for students to pose questions on social structure (Godfray & Grayman, 2014; Olcoń et al., 2020).

Accordingly, critical consciousness is considered the ultimate goal of merging critical pedagogical approaches into reading instruction. The three factors of critical consciousness proposed by Schneider (2019), define the state of consciousness; critical awareness refers to students' awareness of social relation and power existing in texts and reality, critical reflection alludes to the ability to realize ongoing dominant power in texts and living systems with multifaceted perspectives, and critical action defines the actions to question the power of hegemonic ideas and to act against injustice in diverse ways.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In this study, we employed a mixed-method design (Creswell, 2011), in combination with action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Gebhard, 2005), where quantitative and qualitative data could, together, identify

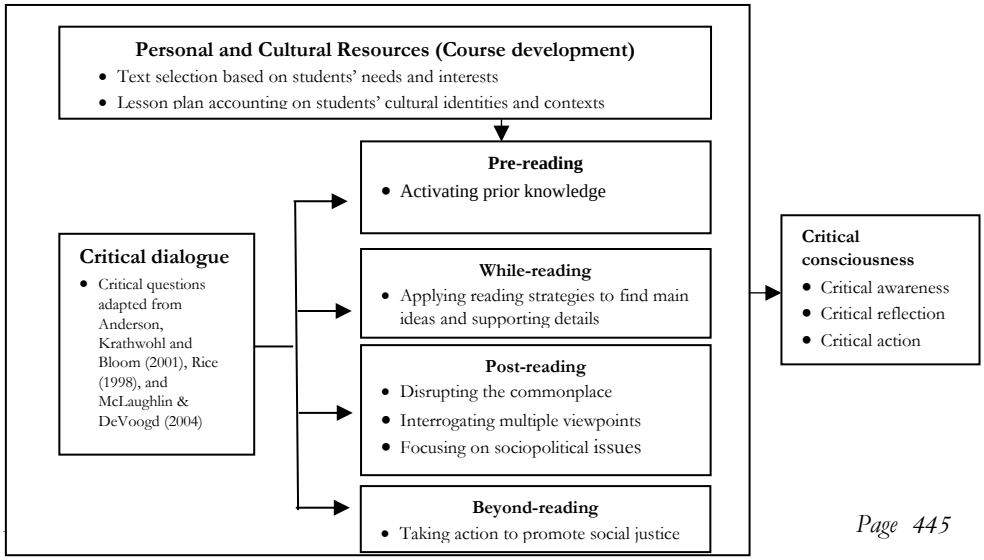
students' critical consciousness development and the extent of their reading ability through critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction. The solid foundation of the former approach lends strong evidence for research claims (Creswell et al., 2011; Gay et al., 2009), and the nature of action best serves exploration in relation to classroom practice with such aspects of critical theory (Kemmis et al., 2014) as what we focused in this research. In these combination approaches, a one-group pretest-posttest was situated to inquire the data in relation to the research questions (Cacay, 2022). The action research, the approach encouraging "a problem-posing cyclic process through which teachers can identify, investigate, and try to solve problems in their teaching" (Gebhard, 2005, p. 54) can be well aligned with the concept of critical pedagogy, which encourages students' community-based learning and democratic education (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Therefore, this study was drawn on the stages combined from mixed-method approach and action research approach in regard to the cycle planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Gebhard, 2005).

## Research Framework

The teaching sphere emphasizes the classroom practice for reading comprehension along with the cultivation of critical consciousness. The figure below illustrates the groundworks and models pertaining to reading instruction and critical models of teaching, derived from Shor and Freire (1987), Lewison et al. (2015), Schneider (2019) and Rungwaraphong (2018).

## Figure 2

*A model of critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction*



According to the model of critical-dialogue-oriented reading instruction, the study initially commenced with the dimension of personal and cultural resources regarding raising participants' knowledge or needs and interests which led to the selection of reading topics. The reading texts implemented in classrooms were taken from novels, excerpts from online blogs, and news as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*List of reading texts implemented in this study*

| Reading Texts | Themes |
|---|---|
| Ariel | Love and beauty privilege |
| Pat and Paulette | Gender diversity |
| Boys or Girls: Why do we even have to prefer? | Gender discrimination |
| Coco Chanel | Fashion and autobiography |
| The Necklace | Capitalism and social classes |
| Wonder | Differences in society |
| A very old man and enormous wings | Beliefs and norms |

The classroom texts integrated critical dialogue through four stages: pre-reading discussions on their lived experiences, while reading activities for cognitive development, post-reading critical analysis using questions, and beyond-reading tasks, recontextualizing social injustices found in critical readings. (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Examples of critical questions*

| Pre-reading questions | While-reading questions | Post-reading questions |
|---|---|---|
| - What can I guess about the perspectives of the writer?<br>- Does the title and the given vocabulary, images, or quotes provide you any clue to the content in the text?<br>- Could you relate the concept from the title to your lived-experiences? | - What are the ideas of each paragraph?<br>- What perspectives, practices or people are valued in the text?<br>- How many characters presented in the text?<br>- How are you like/dislike the story? | - How is each idea in the text connected to each other?<br>- Could you please retell the story in your own words?<br>- How could you compare the similarities and differences of the situation to your own contexts |

## Research Context and the Course

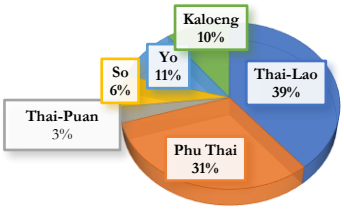
This study took place in a community university in the upper Northeastern part of Thailand, where most of the students were from different multiethnic groups (e.g., Phu Tai, Yo, Kaloeng) with distinctive cultural experiences. Consequently, the community university serves as a rich place where the students interact multi-culturally, socially, and academically, and where instruction on consciousness-raising should lead to various research areas of benefit. The research site of this study was a compulsory course for first-year English major students, entitled Fundamental Reading and Writing Development, a 16-week with 3-credit course in the second semester of 2021. Its description covers "Reading strategies for reading comprehension, classifying text types, and practice of fundamental writing." Reading practices emphasized students' reading comprehension ability through the use of various strategies and the accommodation of social and cultural critical perspectives. Writing practices took place after the students considered their ideas from reading parts, and then expressed their feelings towards the meaning of texts.

## Participants

The participants of this study were 30 first-year English Major students enrolled in the Fundamental Reading and Writing Development course, provided by the community university system, as a random-based approach essential for research achieved through intervention (Slavin, 2007). As the course was obligatory, the participants were thus an intact group consistent with purposive sampling. The participants were legitimately recruited according to ethical regulations which asserted their rights to withdraw from the research project without affecting their grades.

**Figure 2**

*Ethnic backgrounds of the participant*



The participants from multiethnic groups carry multiple ethnic backgrounds to the classroom. The majority of participants' backgrounds were Thai Lao (39%), followed by Phu Tai (31%). The remainder were from local ethnic tribes: Yo (11%), Kaloeng (10%), So (6%), and Thai-Puan (3%). Their English language efficiency was limited due to their high school records on O-NET scores which depict relationship with the low English academic achievements (Pensiri & Adunyarittigun, 2019). Also, their English language ability was in the range of A2-B1 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR).

## Research Instruments

### *Quantitative Instruments*

In quantitative inquiries, there were two instruments implemented in this study: a self-evaluation questionnaire and a reading comprehension test. The questionnaire was adapted from the Critical Consciousness of Educator Scale (Schneider, 2019). The 15 items presented on the questionnaire were adapted to match Northeastern students' cultural and social contexts, and the adaptation was a reference to the three critical factors originally taken from Schneider (2019): critical awareness, critical reflection, and critical action. The items combined participants' experiences with reading practices and relevant social and cultural contextual issues. The questionnaire was administered at the beginning and end of the semester to determine the difference in their ability to cultivate critical consciousness throughout the semester.

The other instrument was the reading comprehension test to investigate students' reading ability before and after participating in the study. The test was a standardized test with 15 multiple-choice questions, authorized by Michigan Language Assessment (MET). The test was taken to double-check with experts, and the validation provided compatibility between items and participants' language ability, connected to the purpose of investigating reading comprehension ability.

### *Qualitative Instruments*

The study utilized various qualitative instruments, including open-ended questions to capture diverse participants' perceptions. End-of-study semi-structured interviews explored insightful aspects of the critical-dialogue-oriented reading instruction. The recruitment of the participants relied on participants' willingness to participate. The interview questions were constructed based on an interview protocol model (Castillo-Montaya, 2016) and were validated by three experts with the Index of Item-Objective

Congruence (IOC). Classroom observation tracked circumstances such as conversations, gestures, and interactions with the research questions. Reflective journals provided cognitive insights and internal experiences, allowing the participants to write in both English and Thai, ensuring inclusively and reducing language barriers.

**Research Procedure**

In the research procedure, the 4 main steps for action research suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Gebhard (2005) were followed—*Plan, Act, Observe*, and *Reflect*. In the first step, *Plan*, the instruments were designed to be aligned with the conceptual framework which were critical dialogue (Shor & Freire, 1987), critical literacy model (Lewison et al., 2015), critical consciousness (Schneider, 2019), and validated with the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value (Turmer & Carlson, 2003), the IOC values rated over the instruments was between 0.67-1. The instruments were distributed to a pilot study. Before the semester started, the survey on the students' need on reading text was allocated to collect the reading topics based on students' interests and inquiries.

Then, the *Act* step is the data collection stage, where the participants were informed about the course objectives, they were also asked to complete the self-evaluation questionnaire and reading comprehension test in advance before the semester began. Later on, the teaching reading English in social issues using critical dialogue took place along the study. As the course concerned practices of reading and writing, the participants interacted with the reading texts by taking 2 weeks per text. Also, the participatory observation was carried out along the study to gain indicative phenomenon.

In the third step of action research, *Observe,* after completing the final reading and writing exercise of the research, the students submitted their reflective journals. The participants then completed reading comprehension test (MET) and the questionnaire on students' self-evaluation on critical consciousness development which was utilized to gather the data from comparative analysis. Finally, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview to collect more insightful data from seven voluntary participants in the last week of the study.

The final step, *Reflect*, entailed collecting and analyzing the data with our ongoing interpretations that shaped the extent to which the participants developed their reading ability through a critical dialogue on social issues, as well as ways that assisted the participants in developing their critical consciousness. Our reflective ideas not only explained the outcomes, but also served as evaluation thoughts both within and outside of the research. This gave an opportunity to investigate what would not be effective, and which

might then be modified. All the actions reflect our awareness which is recursive in nature (Gebhard, 2005).

### Data Analysis

In quantitative analysis, the data was derived from two types of data sources: self-evaluation questionnaires and reading comprehension tests. They were analyzed through the SPSS program, where mean, percentage, and standard deviation were employed to analyze the items rated by the participants. A Paired Sample Test (T-Test) was used to examine the progress of critical consciousness development. (Ross & Willson, 2018).

For qualitative analysis, the analysis employed two methods to the analytical process: analytic induction (Katz, 2001) and thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Creswell, 2011). The analytic induction investigated the data of the underpinning interaction derived from the observation field notes and students' reflective journals. The thematic analysis was employed as a tool to investigate the results from the open-ended part of the questionnaire, observation field notes, and interview transcripts. Coding was employed to reorganize and categorize the data as the method of discovery (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure data accuracy, the researchers consulted two debriefers familiar with Northeastern English contexts. This discussion resolved ambiguities and confirming data reliability.

## Findings

### Research Question 1: *To what extent do participants develop their reading ability through critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction?*

Reading scores from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using descriptive statistics to show how students' reading abilities had changed (Ross & Willson, 2018). Table 3 presents the mean score of the pretest which was 5.96 (39.73%) and after the completion of the study, the posttest mean score increased to 9.16 (61.60%) with a t-test value of 19.76 (P value = .001). The statistical results suggest that the participants' reading comprehension ability has significantly developed after participating in the critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction.

**Table 3**

*The statistical analysis of reading comprehension scores*

| Result | $\overline{X}$ | S.D. | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre** | 5.96 | 1.44 | 19.76 | .001 |
| **Post** | 9.16 | 1.53 | | |

As supportive evidence, qualitative inquiries provided results which revealed the development of reading ability along the teaching processes. Table 4 presents the relation of cognitive domain (Anderson et al., 2001) and students' reading ability. The table explains the improvement of students' reading ability, in which, they were able to reach reading comprehension and steered to reading with critical lens.

**Table 4**

*Students' reading ability in relation to Bloom's revised cognitive domains throughout the semester*

| Bloom's revised cognitive domain (Anderson et al., 2001) | Students' reading ability |
|---|---|
| Remember<br>Understand | Reading comprehension |
| Apply<br>Analyze | Reading with critical lens |
| Evaluate<br>Create | Reading to Writing |

## The development of reading comprehension

Reading assignments focused on basic understanding, assisting lower order thinking skills. The preparatory activities introduced terms and concepts that engaged learners in critical dialogues among peers. This dialogue enhanced comprehension during reading, fostering a deeper understanding of the texts. The evidence was also shown through the reflective journals as shown below.

> At first, I was confused about the terms such as beauty privilege, patriarchy, discrimination, or second class but I got them from the explanation from the teacher and my friends in the talk before reading the text. I could read better by working on the definition of the given terms like I could predict the story when reading the text. (Student 30)

> Studying the terms presented in the text made me understand the text in a way I never looked at the text before. The word

> selection of the writer had different meanings to the interpretation of me and my friends. It was quite fun when I took the definitions of the terms to share with my friends. (Student 22)

The leading critical questions raised during the reading practices triggered the participants to raise questions about the reading passages, communicate their experiences, and discuss them in or across groups. In line with Tolongtong and Adundyarittigun (2020), raising questions toward the texts assisted students' reading comprehension since they actively engaged with their reading by exchanging the ideas with their peers. With the awareness of language use in text production, the students tended to reach for the literal meaning as well as the subtle norms of the writers (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). As a reflective evaluation, reading activities regarding the introduction of debatable terms and concepts was supportive for the participants to gather the ideas to read more effectively.

## Moving Beyond Reading Comprehension

With the cognitive domains, the findings are consistent with students' ability to apply, analyze, and evaluate. After settling into the main ideas of the passages, the participants revisited the texts with a critical lens to seek the writer's intentions, text constructions, and uncover the dominant power in the texts. The observation field notes highlighted that some participants had different views toward the same issues, and some participants revisited the texts when their peers pointed out similar experiences and knowledge. This accords with McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) where critical inquiries were shown to broaden individuals' views to perceive the world outside of classroom settings.

> Teacher: According to the text, are there any alternative perspectives that should be represented?
> Student 12: I think the writer intended to convince the readers to place biases on Ursula by using the words like ugly, evil, or witch … but with Ariel … the writer picked the words like beautiful, silent beauty. In my opinion, this is how we are persuaded to think or feel by the writers.
> Teacher: Don't you think that is the way the writer intended to make the story more fun or exciting?
> Student 21: When I was a kid, I enjoyed very much with princess stories, Ariel was one of them… but now I read it and I feel different, not that it was not fun, but I think the portrayal was biased on Ariel and Ursula's appearance. Why all the villains have to be presented ugly?

> Student 12: It reminded me of my sister who has a daughter, and she always says she wants to be beautiful by dressing like Ariel. I had that moment too when I was in my kindergarten (Laugh).

According to the dialogue above, it broadened the participants' views to acknowledge the overlooked aspects that went unnoticed. The dialogue was taken based on the reading text '*Ariel*', where the portrayal of characters was criticized to how the writer drew out the characters with descriptive terms. The ensuing discussion indicated students' critical lens when reading and showed they could also relate to the power which influence individual's desire or values.

> When I read the text about gender discrimination, I did not really understand how it was like. After talking with my friends and receiving suggestions from the teacher I could see how the word "devastating" explains the reality in the text. (Student 07)

The premise of Student 07 referred to the text entitled '*Boys or Girls: Why do we even have to prefer?*', where the text discussed discrimination against girls and women in developing world. The critical dialogue among the students was taken as a stage for the students to exchange the roles of females in their local communities. This accords with Shin and Crookes (2005), critical inquiries were shown to broaden individuals' views to perceive the world outside of classroom settings.

## Co-constructing Knowledge through Writing Practices

These practices were consistent with the top layer of cognitive domain, *creating*. The analysis of the qualitative data unfolded the transmission between reading and writing that the participants were involved in the post-reading and beyond-reading stage. As mentioned by Student 23 on the writing process, it invited her to rethink the texts in the aspects of a writer who has read the text earlier.

> I learned some sentence structures from the reading texts. Thus, I designed my writings about the reading texts by using the structures I have learned earlier. I have been practicing my writing and I realized that my perspectives to the reading texts and characters in the texts influences my idea expression when writing. (Student 23)

That is to say, the relationship between reading and writing was cooperative, as reading helped enlarge the participants' points of view on

writing. For example, a student expressed her feeling through her piece of writing that *'Our society should have the basis of respect, equality, right, and freedom. The comparison between different people is unfair. We should talk and listen instead of judging each other.'* The other instance was a piece of a student delivering his idea after reading a text about social class and capitalism, '*People's values should not be measured by assets we own because we do not have the same life opportunities*.' The students' work revealed the compatibility between reading and writing practices as this cycle established thought-provoking reading basis with ideas transmitted to be the ideas expresses through writing works. Being both readers and writers granted the opportunity for the participants to foster their literacy practices with holistic views (Cooney et al., 2018; Huang, 2011).

**Research question 2: How can the participants' critical consciousness be developed by critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction?**

An analysis of quantitative data revealed that the participants self-rated their critical consciousness as having improved after taking part in this study. The statistical results are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

*The statistics results of the self-evaluation questionnaires*

| Result | $\overline{X}$ | S.D. | t | Sig. | Grand mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pre** | 3.89 | .39 | 4.761 | .001 | 3.91 |
| **Post** | 4.27 | .26 | | | 4.25 |

The mean score of the post-self-evaluation was found statistically significant at .001. The two sets of data revealed the mean score of the pre-self-evaluation was at 3.89 (S.D. = .39) and rated up to 4.27 (S.D. = .26) for the post-one. The statistical results also presented the t-test for both data with the value of 4.761 and the P value was pointed at .001 which was less than .05. The grand mean of pre-self-evaluation shows the value of 3.91 which referred to the fairly high level of awareness that the participants clinched before the study. While the grand mean of post-self-evaluation presents its value at 4.25 which is higher than that of the pre-self-evaluation. The participants reported their improvement of critical consciousness while engaging in critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction.

**Awareness of Social Relation and Power**

The primal stage of critical consciousness refers to critical awareness (Freire, 1970). Table 6 contains Item 1 to Item 7 which indicate the awareness

of social relations and power that exists and places some effects in students' contexts.

**Table 6**

*The statistics results on the awareness on social relation and power*

| | No. | Items | Pre | | Post | | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| The awareness on social relation and power | 1. | I can identify diversity in my classroom settings. | 3.6 | .81 | 4.23 | .63 | .63 |
| | 2. | I believe that politics has a major role in our society. | 4.43 | .77 | 4.63 | .56 | .2 |
| | 3. | There are beliefs, norms, notions, and ideologies in reading texts. | 4.2 | .92 | 4.30 | .79 | .1 |
| | 4. | I realize that dominant power exists in systems in society. | 3.53 | .96 | 4.07 | .78 | .54 |
| | 5. | I realize that reading texts are socially constructed. | 3.9 | .80 | 4.53 | .68 | .63 |
| | 6. | I can relate my experience of encountering inequalities (ethnic background, class, race, gender, age). | 3.53 | .90 | 4.50 | .82 | .97 |
| | 7. | I can give examples of ongoing inequalities in my context. | 3.80 | 1.03 | 4.20 | 0.71 | .4 |
| | | Grand mean | 3.85 | .88 | 4.35 | 0.71 | .5 |

N = 30
4.21-5.00 = Highly aware, 3.41–4.20 = Aware, 2.61-3.40 = Uncertain, 1.81-2.60 = Slightly aware, 1.00-1.80 = Unaware

As shown in the table, the grand mean score on social relations and power awareness was rated at 3.85 (SD=.88) in pre-self-evaluation and increased to 4.35 (SD=.71) in post-self-evaluation. The findings suggest that participants became more aware of social structures shaped by powerful individuals and authorities. The result is consistent with Cui and Teo (2023) , the concept of fostering critical perspectives branches out the core knowledge given in the lesson to align with the individual contexts of the students.

To support the findings, the forms of a statement taken from the open-ended part of the questionnaire and an extract from a participant's reflective journal show how the participants cultivated awareness of the situations by stating about the further social situations which occur under the predominant power they might undergo in the future and the chance to recollect their past experiences regarding whether they were the oppressed or the oppressors.

> I feel mad for Auggy that he was bullied by his deformed face, and he had to try harder than other kids just to have his own friends to play with. I had to ask myself if I have ever done

> mean things to someone I did not like in the past. I can recall that I used to tease my friends that they did not look beautiful. (Student 04)
>
> If we look for power in society, I can see it in many forms. As our society is kind of patriarchal, the jobs and roles are separated by birth gender. Like me, I am always accused of being too timorous that I have a duty raising my little brother at home. (Student 01)

The participants' journal reflections show how they cultivated awareness of power dynamics in social situations. For example, Student 04 mentioned a reading text called *Wonder* which depicted the difficulty that people with disabilities experience and endure. It also stimulated the participants to engage their experiential knowledge of current social practices by analyzing how people are socially positioned. The premises from Student 01 from his experiences regarding the power in society occurred after interacting with a reading text on gender roles and gender discrimination, where Northeastern people believe that boys should focus on earning income to support the household rather than engaging in household chores, which are traditionally associated with 'girls work'. (Kaithong & Sawangdee, 2017). The participant associated the word "accuse" to assert his feelings about being judged by the patriarchal norms of gender. In other words, the implementation of critical dialogue in the reading process revealed unbalanced norms embedded in local societies (Farias & da Silva, 2021).

## Reflection on Ongoing Circumstances and Living Systems

To investigate the dimension of critical reflections, Table 7 shows the items regarding equality in job opportunities and quality in education through Item 8 and Item 9, while Items 10 to 12 centers around reflection on living systems.

## Table 7

*The statistics results on reflection on ongoing circumstances and on living conditions*

| | No. | Items | Pre | | Post | | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| Reflection on ongoing | 8.* | Males and females are equal regarding job opportunities. | 4.20 | 1.16 | 4.03 | 0.88 | .17 |
| | 9.* | Students from different racial and ethnic groups can equally access the | 3.93 | .97 | 3.77 | 1.04 | .16 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | education system where their cultural identities are not impeded. | | | | | |
| | Grand mean | 4 | 1 | 3.98 | .96 | .16 |
| Reflection on living system | 10. Identity representation influences social interaction. | 4.77 | .43 | 4.77 | .43 | 0 |
| | 11. Diversity exists in all systems in society, and it makes different values. | 4.23 | .77 | 4.52 | .57 | .29 |
| | 12. Dominant social/political issues influence my perception of understanding what is going on in society. | 4 | .83 | 4.03 | .93 | .03 |
| | Grand mean | 4.33 | .67 | 4.44 | .64 | .11 |

N = 30

4.21-5.00 = Highly aware, 3.41–4.20 = Aware, 2.61-3.40 = Uncertain, 1.81-2.60 = Slightly aware, 1.00-1.80 = Unaware

According to item 8 and item 9, participants' reflections on the ongoing circumstances presented a decreased mean score of gender equality in job opportunities and equality in education. The grand mean score of these aspects was valued at 4 (SD=1) in the pre-self-evaluation and decreased to 3.98 (SD=.96) in the post-self-evaluation. For gender equality in job opportunities, the mean scores decreased from 4.20 (SD=1.16) to 4.03 (SD=.88). In the same way, the norms of equality in accessing education dropped to 3.77 (SD=1.04) from 3.93 (SD=.97). Since both items refer to equality for males and females in jobs, the participants evaluated these aspects higher than those of the post-self-evaluation. These numbers suggested that the participants showed a decline in their previously held perspectives on gender, job opportunities, and equitable rights in the field of education.

With regards to reflection on the living system, the grand mean score in overall aspects was 4.33 (SD=.67) and went up to 4.44 (.64) in the post-self-evaluation. As regards identity representation, the mean scores were at 4.77 (SD=.43), and there was no change in the mean score in both pre-self-evaluation and post-self-evaluation. The limitation stemmed from their experiences of living in their local according to provincial traits like dialects, religious practices, beliefs, and sociocultural contexts.

Also, in a reading of "Pat and Paulette," notions of empathy self-respect, and gender were uncovered by analyzing two narratives from homosexual individuals. After the participants realized the existence of biases, their perceptions changed from acknowledging them on a personal level to a larger context. One participant reflected on her perspectives in her journal as follows.

> I feel that LGBT friends have been through a lot than me, they should be valued by their abilities or characteristics not by their gender preferences and identities. I am fine with

> gender diversity, but I had no idea how hard to be accepted in the community. The aspects that the writer conveyed through the text presented the difficulties in livings even from the micro level as family. (Student 10)

In the Northeastern context, a belief in a supernatural spirit paved people's perceptions of the phenomena they think are unusual. For example, LGBT people are considered atypical (Pongpanit, 2013) and odd and abnormal who have been punished by nature (Thongtow & Liamprawat, 2020). The participants shared stories that demonstrated the dominant power and its effects on local societies. Consequently, interacting with critical understanding led the students to mitigate prejudices and biases based on their cultural assumptions.

However, the distinctive identities of students might bring some drawback to the classroom practices. The students who possessed more self-confidence seemed to unintentionally place some pressure on those who felt uncomfortable expressing or sharing their notions or opinions due to their personal experiences. An excerpt from an interview with Student 09 exhibits the predicament that occurred at the beginning of the study but was eventually mitigated during the semester by a manifestation of horizontal space to reaffirm the acceptance of all voices.

> The concept of being honest to how I feel is quite far from what I learned from my village. I feel a little embarrassed when I see my classmate spoke out how she feels about the texts and the pictures that the teacher showed to the class. Actually, I want to be brave like her, that is cool not to think about pleasing anybody when we talk. (Student 09)

A critical reflection occurred during the study when the student realized the ongoing dominant power in their context, the student interpreted the situations more widely and critically from those shared stories (Lewison et al., 2002). The participants had chances to revisit their living contexts, and perceived or raised their awareness of how all voices equally matter. The results reflected that critical dialogue eliminated the culture of silence (Freire, 1970).

## Action against Injustice

The ultimate goal of this study was to cultivate students' critical consciousness, the ability to realize, reflect, and act against unjust circumstances. Table 8 shows the increase in students' critical action against injustice from Item 13 to Item 15.

**Table 8**

*The statistics results on action against injustice*

| | No. | Items | Pre | | Post | | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| Action against injustice | 13. | I have raised questions about social injustice on my social platforms. | 3.77 | .97 | 4.10 | .88 | .33 |
| | 14. | I actively encourage my friends to question unjust situations happening in our contexts. | 3.67 | .88 | 3.90 | .80 | .23 |
| | 15. | I stand up to dominant cultures that are eroding my own cultural identities. | 3.20 | .92 | 4.17 | .91 | .97 |
| | | Grand mean | 3.54 | .92 | 4.05 | .86 | .51 |

N = 30
4.21-5.00 = Highly aware, 3.41–4.20 = Aware, 2.61-3.40 = Uncertain, 1.81-2.60 = Slightly aware, 1.00-1.80 = Unaware

The grand mean score in the post-self-evaluation was 4.05 (SD=.86) which was higher than the pre-self-evaluation (Mean=3.54, SD= .92). In agreement with the results from the studies which exposed participants' ability to transform their contexts to be cognizant of equitable justice (Brown & Perry, 2011; Yulianto, 2015). The results revealed that the participants deployed critical dialogue to uncover language patterns, motivating them to work toward addressing injustice through critical action. As presented in the interview transcript below, the participant gradually developed her critical consciousness from raising her voice in classroom practice.

> Researcher: Do you think critical dialogue helps you to be more critical?
> Student 25: Yes, I became more confident to live my life.
> Researcher: Could you explain more?
> Student 25: OK, I work part time in the town and sometimes I came home late due to some work issues. I used to be imputed that I did something bad like I am a brat because getting home late is not a good manner in my village.
> Researcher: What make you think that?
> Student 25: Umm, they think girls should be home after school, do the housework.
> Researcher: Let's go back to you being more confident, what is the reason?
> Student 25: I learned from raising my voices out in the class and the understanding to others. I did not do anything wrong and the villagers are not wrong too. Anyway, when I grow up, I would not accuse anybody in that way.

The concept of gender roles is obvious in Northeastern contexts where local people believe that girls should be raised to do the house chores rather than having jobs outside (Kaithong & Sawangdee, 2017). The above excerpt shows that the student expressed her performance to stand up for her rights and also directed her desire to transform the biases and unjust norms when the same kind of situation occur in the future. Such the norms, EFL students confronted with unbalanced norms and some of those norms partly dictate their lives. As shown in extracts derived from a journal below, the participant stated the action to stand up for his identity and questioned the predominant voices of social preference on language, gender, or beauty privilege.

> Sometimes, I read the texts and I feel I am under the standard. The stories always mention the beautiful characters, or the concept of beauty attracts good things. That is totally unfair. I felt awkward at first because I do not think I am pretty, and I even express my local dialect very clear when I talk in public. After reading texts and had conversations with the teacher and my friends, I could see the idea that govern us such as beauty privilege, language of centrality, or conformity of major values. I was empowered and see no harm to be like me and with my dialect too. In fact, I am proud to be this way, I think being different is fine and people should accept it. (Student 07)

From the extract of Student 07, there was a shift of the perception, from being compliant with social norms to the confidence of possessing local identity. The participants had recontextualized by deconstructing the texts by engaging in critical dialogue and they were exposed to the dominant ideologies which undermine and alienate their own identities. By affirming that the transformative action of being proud of the identity, the student reflected their past which suppressed her identity, yet, the student was urged to raise out her voice and be more confident. This concords with McLaren (2005), who asserts that critical discussion drives students to eventually deconstruct the patterns of power, extending their critical consciousness from the classroom to real-life situations.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The study results highlight significant development of students' critical consciousness through critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction. The instruction enhanced their ability to interpret texts critically, improving reading comprehension ability that was prompted and set as the cornerstone for the students to further advance their high order thinking in reading with

critical perspectives. Engaging with peers on social issues recently occurring in their local communities refined their multifaceted viewpoints, enabling them to challenge injustice and transform perceptions. Supported by the studies, critical dialogue and reading texts with controversial issues triggered students to question the ideas embedded therein. Students' ability to interpret the texts is critically promoted to read beyond the literal meanings with regards of raising critical questions to the discourse (Cui & Teo, 2023).

This underpinning concept of critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction has been considered useful in EFL classroom since it engendered a secure base for the students to begin their learning process with their funds of knowledge. When they engaged with the reading of texts, they were able to bring their lived experiences to compare and analyze the target norms. The relation between texts and students' experiences assisted the students to comprehend the texts more effectively and they could discuss multifaceted ideas due to a variety of cultural backgrounds, including the advocate of learning and co-constructing meanings from the texts (Huang, 2011)

The findings of this study suggest that critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction should be implemented in EFL classrooms to enhance students' reading ability and prepare them to be critically aware readers who decode the texts critically. The study began by understanding students' interests while enhancing their linguistic proficiency and critical thinking through text analysis. Thus, the reading texts should be realistic and based on students' needs and interests since the texts play as the mediator to assist the students in critically constructing their knowledge when they interact with mainstream knowledge in larger contexts. As such, the students could learn the target language and cultures together while maintaining their identities. Texts, therefore, fostered critical discussion and filled knowledge gaps. Initial challenges arose due to unfamiliarity with critical views, especially concerning social issues. However, democratic discussions gradually allowed students the confidence to ask critical questions and analyze their realities through the critical dialogues. The shared discussion invited multiple viewpoints from different contexts and the students were exposed to the larger sociocultural and sociopolitical settings and contributed towards reflections of change or actions leading to challenging dominant ideologies.

As per Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the last step of action research is reflection; the reflections drawn from the data suggested that critical dialogue-oriented reading instruction assists students in becoming critically aware readers. This process is explored by Shin and Crookes (2005), who found that when an encouraging context and a welcoming environment for dialogue were offered, students' active engagement emerged.

To enhance critical dialogue-oriented instruction in reading classrooms, we suggest expanding participant diversity beyond Northeastern sociocultural areas. Also, longer data collection and longitudinal studies may provide more comprehensive insights. Lastly, diversifying texts, including academic texts or lyrical content would enrich the learning experience. This study aims to guide language teachers and researchers, offering practical insights for effective instruction and real-life use. Finally, it is hoped that this study will provide valuable insights for the language teachers and researchers who aim to enhance their literacy teaching and future academic works to be practical in both instructional areas and in real life use.

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