

Scrutinizing Critical Literacy Pedagogy in the Institutionally Developed Foundation English Textbooks for Thai Undergraduate Students

Phachara Saiphet

phachara.s@litu.tu.ac.th, Language Institute, Thammasat University, Thailand

APA Citation: Saiphet, P. (2025). Scrutinizing critical literacy pedagogy in the institutionally developed foundation English textbooks for Thai undergraduate students. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 18(2), 821-842. <https://doi.org/10.70730/ICAF1806>

Received 07/05/2025	ABSTRACT
Received in revised form 25/06/2025	This paper examines critical literacy pedagogy in two institutionally developed foundation English textbooks used in a public university in Thailand. The study has two main objectives: 1) to investigate the essential features of critical literacy pedagogy within the textbooks, and 2) to assess the extent to which these textbooks promote critical literacy among Thai undergraduate students. Instructional activities in these textbooks were analyzed using a critical literacy pedagogical framework through qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that these textbooks embodied three essential features of critical literacy pedagogy including engaging, guiding, and expanding students' thinking pertaining to societal issues and unequal power relations. The intermediate-level English textbook contained more activities that provided greater opportunities for students to critically reflect on social issues compared to the pre-intermediate textbook. This paper highlights the importance of critical literacy in English language courses and offers valuable implications for the development of English language textbooks and materials for Thai undergraduate students.
Accepted 01/07/2025	

	Keywords: critical literacy, English language textbooks, Thai university context
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Introduction

In today's turbulent world that is bursting with disparity, conflicts are rife. In Thailand, such conflicts arise from several issues such as social stratification, marginalization, inequality, and injustice (Adunyarittigun, 2022). Grounded in the belief that education holds great potential for questioning and transforming the status quo, critical literacy is regarded as an instructional approach that aims at empowering individuals to critique oppression and exploitation to resolve conflicts and restore peace to societies (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shore, 1999). Critical literacy is deemed to be essential in classroom practices, for it allows students to become active participants in the reading process, and encourages readers to question, examine, or argue over the existence of power relations between readers and writers (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004a, 2004b).

In English language teaching, textbooks play a pivotal role as the main teaching materials that shape the objectives, content, and methods of teaching (Richards, 2014; Tomlinson, 2015). Besides, English language textbooks influence how students perceive the target language and its culture (Gray & Block, 2014). The content and representation within textbooks carry political implications, for decisions about what is included are often determined by those who are in power such as publishers, writers, educational institutions, Ministries of Education, and so on. Furthermore, they are perceived as cultural artefacts that convey several layers of meaning and connect the language being taught with specific behaviors, language varieties, ways of using language, and particular sets of values (Gray, 2013). Hence, they go beyond merely transmitting the knowledge of English to students. Nonetheless, they shape students' roles, performances, and social positions beyond the classroom.

The previous studies regarding English textbook analysis in the context of Thailand have centered around many aspects such as cultural contents (Labtic & Teo, 2020; Saemee & Nomnian, 2021), English language skills (Jitpranee, 2020; Srisunakrua & Chumworatayee, 2019), and teachers' perceptions toward the use of the English textbooks (Pornsakkul, 2015; Ulla, 2019). Nevertheless, textbook analyses have yet to adequately address the realities of social issues and unequal power hierarchies in Thailand. There has been little focus on fostering critical engagement with English texts. To address this limitation, the present study seeks to fill the gap by exploring how

critical literacy pedagogy is represented in English language textbooks accordingly.

This research examines the essential features of critical literacy pedagogy in the institutionally developed English textbooks and investigates the extent to which these textbooks promote critical literacy among Thai undergraduate students. It will benefit textbook writers, curriculum developers, and English language by raising awareness of critical literacy and its application in English language teaching materials.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the essential features of critical literacy pedagogy in the institutionally developed English textbooks?
2. To what extent do these institutionally developed English textbooks promote critical literacy for Thai undergraduate students?

Literature Review

Critical Literacy Pedagogy and the Teaching of English

The term “literacy” is perceived as reading and writing (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Luke, 2014). However, critical literacy extends far beyond the basic skills of reading and writing. It is an approach that involves using literacy as a tool to address social injustice in peripheral societies (Luke, 2014; Mills, 2016). It is rooted in Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy that provokes students into critically exploring their social reality, asymmetrical power hierarchies, and inequalities. From this perspective, literacy is understood as a form of cultural politics, for it functions as a set of practices that can either empower or disempower people and foster democratic and emancipatory transformation (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Particularly, Freire has the strongly-held belief in the relationship between reading the word and reading the world. To elaborate, to be literate refers to people’s ability to read the word, whereas reading the world means people’s consciousness of social and political circumstances where they are living in. To clarify, literate people are better equipped to recognize and understand the social and political conditions of their communities.

Critical literacy helps young learners to read the texts with greater awareness of unequal power relations, identity, and disparities (Janks, 2013). More importantly, it offers crucial conceptual tools to the students to critique the omissions, silences, and biases within the texts and their producers (Mills, 2016). Beyond mere comprehension, students are encouraged to critically engage with texts by juxtaposing the texts against each other, deconstructing, and reconstructing their meanings, and considering how these texts relate to their broader historical, cultural, and political contexts. Moreover, critical

literacy aims at examining the language, texts, and their discourse structures as major modes of representing and reshaping the possible worlds (Luke, 2012). As per Morrell (2008), critical literacy pedagogy deepens students' understanding of knowledge as socially constructed, teaches them how to resist power, oppression and control, and empower them to use language and texts to disclose and challenge the status quo. Many aspects including critical thinking, identity, aesthetics, and voice and agency of learners underlie much of critical literacy pedagogy (Kalantzis et al., 2016). These elements equip students with the realities they will encounter in the world beyond the classroom. Students' voices, funds of knowledge, and funds of identity are acknowledged and valued in the learning process.

Critical literacy offers a broader approach to the teaching of English in Thailand by encouraging teachers to prioritize the development of students' political consciousness. English language classrooms should serve as spaces for reflecting on and discussing the political orientation to the teaching and learning, social problems, and power relations (Luke, 2014). Moreover, English lessons should equip students with skills to critically analyze the omissions, silences, and biases within texts (Mills, 2016). In lieu of responding to comprehension questions, students should engage in a conversation with the texts they read. They should be taught to interrogate the writers, discuss and scrupulously investigate the texts, and contemplate how historical, cultural and political contexts influence their interpretation. Furthermore, English language lessons should provide a forum for discussing social issues, for these discussions shape how students reflect the world in which they are residing.

All in all, critical literacy pedagogy plays a crucial role in empowering people to seek truth, resist oppression, and develop a critical consciousness of social justice. Its concept entails using and analyzing language with much greater awareness of identity, power, and social ramifications (Mills, 2016). Also, it underscores the importance of social equity in marginalized and disenfranchised communities and demonstrates how language and power intersect to shape people and society.

Critical Literacy and the English Language Teaching Scenarios in Thailand

Within the university context of Thailand, English language teachers are responsible for improving Thai students' proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening for both academic and specific purposes. Nevertheless, a mere emphasis on linguistic competence seems insufficient to transform English language students into critical readers, for they encounter various sociocultural and sociopolitical environments that affect

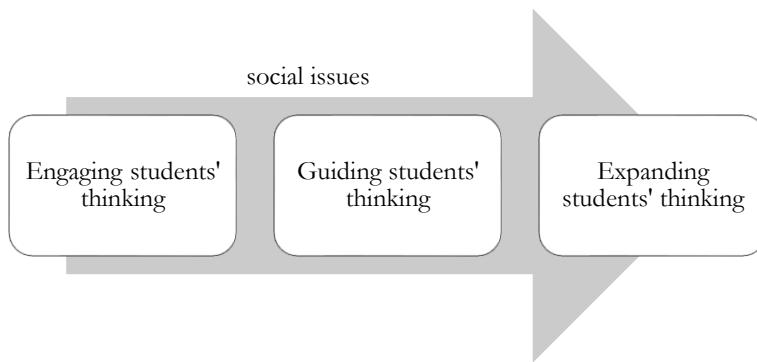
how they interpret texts in their daily lives (Wichanee & Thongrin, 2024). In line with the principles of critical literacy, English language teachers' duties extend far beyond developing students' linguistic competence. They are also positioned to guide students toward critical awareness to contribute to a future vision of socially just world. Adunyarittigun (2017) posits that English language teachers are duty-bound to improve students' English proficiency and bolster their critical minds with social consciousness to deal with conflict and other unjust phenomenon in their society. Therefore, to develop the English curriculum, materials, and lessons in response to the current global circumstances, incorporating critical literacy pedagogy is deemed to be of crucial importance, for it allows students to contemplate, criticize, and share their thoughts about the nexus between the texts and the world in which they are dwelling. Besides, it provides students with some spaces to use the English language to discuss about ethics, fairness, discourse and identity, values and action as well as scrupulously investigate the possible social effects of different positions.

However, research on critical literacy in the context of English language teaching in Thailand remains limited. Only a small number of papers have been discovered. While some papers acknowledge the essence of critical literacy and offer justifications for its implementation, comprehensive explorations in this area are still scarce. For instance, Adunyarittigun (2017) raises concerns over conflicts and violence inside and outside of the English language classrooms and suggests the implementation of a critical literacy framework to establish a culture of peace in a reading class for Thai undergraduate students. Additionally, Khamratana and Adunyarittigun (2021) express concern about marginalized students in the borderland school context in the northeastern part of Thailand and propose critical pedagogy as an alternative to teaching English literacy to help them deal with the oppression students experiences and make a connection between students' knowledge and real-life experience and tackle difficulties. Moreover, some papers highlight the potential for integrating critical literacy into English language teaching in Thailand. For example, Adunyarittigun (2022) applies critical literacy in an advanced reading class to enhance Thai undergraduate students' critical awareness of conflict in society. Besides, Wichanee and Thongrin (2024) examine critical consciousness development of multicultural students in a Thai university located in northeastern Thailand through the teaching of reading and writing. Their findings indicate that students are able to engage in critical literacy through reading to writing practice to deepen their critical consciousness of asymmetrical power relations in societies. These studies point to the feasibility of embedding critical literacy within English language teaching in Thailand.

Conceptual Framing

Figure 1

Critical Literacy Pedagogical Framework



Among various critical literacy frameworks, the researcher chose to employ the above framework adapted from McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004b) as it was straightforward and comprehensible. It was designed to facilitate students' understanding of the texts. To elaborate, it enables students as readers to approach texts critically and offers guidance as they engage in analyzing social issues and asymmetrical power relations. This framework consists of three core features of critical literacy pedagogy including engaging, guiding, and extending students' thinking as illustrated in Figure 1. To elaborate, firstly, for engaging students' thinking, teachers activate students' background knowledge, capture their attention to the text, and establish a clear purpose for reading. Secondly, for guiding students' thinking, during reading, teachers use a wide variety of activities that support student engagement by prompting them while they read silently; for example, teachers use patterned partner reading, the bookmark technique, connection stems, and say something. Finally, after reading, teachers help students extend their reading from a critical stance by facilitating critical discussions and encouraging action based on their readings. In other words, students are prompted to think beyond the topics or the texts themselves by incorporating social issues and power relations that stand out as the critical literacy's essential points. Social issues refer to problems and controversies that create challenges for many people of society such as poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, malnutrition, and others. Unequal power relations entail situations in which one party holds greater power, influence, or control over another.

Focal Textbooks

Two institutionally developed English textbooks used at a Thai public university were selected for this study. These textbooks, simply titled English I and English II, were designed and developed by a group of the faculty members from a Thai public university. The first book was authored by a group of Thai faculty members, while the second was written by an international team comprised of British and American faculty members. These textbooks were published by a local publisher of the university. They were first released in 2019. English I was designed for students with a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency, whereas English II targeted those at an intermediate level. These textbooks served as the main teaching materials for the foundation English courses, also known as English I and II. Both courses were compulsory for all first-year Thai undergraduate students who were non-English majors across all faculties. Each semester, over a thousand students enrolled in these courses which were taught by both Thai and international instructors from the language institute. However, some students might be exempt from one or both courses if their English test scores satisfied the criteria outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Guidelines for Assigning Students to Appropriate English Courses

Types of test scores accepted	Required to take both English I and II	Exempt from English I but required to take English II	Exempt from both English I and II
O-NET ¹ (English)	0.00 – 49.99	50.00 – 74.99	75 – 100
U-GET PBT ²	0 – 450	460 – 540	550 – 1000
U-GET CBT ³	0 – 69	70 – 79	80 – 120
TOEFL IBT	0 – 69	70 – 79	80 – 120
IELTS	Overall scores do not exceed 4.0.	Overall scores are either 4.5 – 5.5 OR 6 but less than 5.5 for some skills	Overall scores are 6.0 and above, but each skill is not less than 5.5.

Based on the scores presented in the table above, students required to take both English I and II demonstrated relatively low English proficiency. This group was the primary target customers for the textbooks. These scores emphasized the construct of these textbooks that were designed to serve the purpose of developing students' English proficiency in particular. The components of these textbooks included the instructional activities that

aimed to enhance students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills plus English grammar and vocabulary.

The textbooks were chosen based on these criteria. Firstly, they were used by the majority of Thai first-year undergraduate students enrolled in two compulsory English foundation courses as well as by plenty of teachers across all university campuses. Secondly, they were in-house teaching materials developed by faculty members of the university who understood the local needs of the students and the teaching context. Thirdly, they were recently published by the local university publisher and sold by the university bookstores. Lastly, the researcher had personal experience in using these textbooks to teach several groups of students.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Table 2

Coding Scheme for Analyzing Critical Literacy Pedagogy in the Reading Activities

Code	Description
eng	The activities that engage students' thinking
gui	The activities that guide students' thinking
ext	The activities that extend students' thinking
si	The activities that address social problems and controversies in the society such as poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, malnutrition, etc.
gen	The activities that cover general topics and do not focus on social problems such as food, money, love, sports, games, songs, etc.

The researcher followed several steps to analyze the instructional activities in each textbook. First of all, the textbooks were skimmed to gain an overall understanding of their contents, topics, illustrations, and written texts. Then, each page was carefully explored for elements related to critical literacy pedagogy. Next, content analysis was employed as it was well-suited for examining specific written words, texts, or images of chosen documents (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). All instructional activities were thoughtfully examined and categorized into the following types: activities engaging students' thinking (eng), activities guiding students' thinking (gui), activities expanding students' thinking (exp), activities addressing social issues (si), and activities covering general topics (gen) (see Table 2). Indicators for social issues were societal problems, and controversies in the society such as poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, malnutrition, etc. However, general issues referred to broader topics that did not focus on social problems such as food, money, love, sports, games, songs, etc. After that, the

contents of these textbooks were juxtaposed for comparison. The researcher conducted a mindful and reflexive review of the data. During coding and analysis, the researcher maintained self-awareness of personal biases, assumptions, and potential blind spots. To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the data were reviewed three times and verified through peer cross-checking. Finally, the results were summarized and discussed.

Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study. Both textbooks were found to consist of similar components. Each textbook was composed of eight units. Each unit constituted the lead-in activities, instructional activities such as listening tasks, reading texts, reading strategies, and comprehension questions, as well as grammatical points with exercises, writing practices, and speaking activities. Moreover, some activities featured pictures to support students' visual comprehension.

Based on the analysis of the central themes in each unit, it became evident that English II offered more challenging opportunities for students to engage with social issues compared to English I. As shown in Table 3, English I presented fundamental concepts related to students' daily lives such as food, people, money, love, and video games. In contrast, English II addressed more complex social issues and unequal power relations in the society, covering topics including culture and society, going green, road safety, inequality, antibiotic resistance, and a smart city.

Both institutionally developed English textbooks embodied three essential features of critical literacy pedagogy including engaging students' thinking, guiding student's thinking, and expanding students' thinking. To elaborate, they consisted of lead-in activities to engage students, some reading strategies to guide students' thinking prior to reading passages, and some further activities that encouraged critical reflection beyond the texts. These activities facilitated critical reading and interaction with the texts, promoted critical discussion, and encouraged students to approach the texts from critical perspectives. However, not every activity in every unit addressed social issues and power relations directly. Despite that, all activities aroused students' thinking in different ways.

For English I, activities related to social issues were observed in Unit 8 across all three stages of critical literacy pedagogy. Units 2 and 5 included activities related to social issues in both the engaging and guiding stages. Unit 3 featured such activities in the guiding and expanding stages. Nevertheless, no activities addressing social issues were identified in Units 1, 4, 6, and 7.

Table 3*Overview of Unit Topics in Each Textbook*

English I	English II
Unit 1: Successful People	Unit 1: Culture and Society
Unit 2: Food Allergies	Unit 2: Going Green
Unit 3: Solo Living	Unit 3: Road Safety in Society
Unit 4: Thinking outside the Box	Unit 4: Media
Unit 5: Living in a Digital World	Unit 5: Innovation: Educational Apps
Unit 6: Money Money	Unit 6: Inequality
Unit 7: Love and Relationship	Unit 7: Antibiotic Resistance
Unit 8: Play Video Games	Unit 8: A Smart City

Table 4*Summary of Activities in Both Textbooks that Embody Critical Literacy Pedagogy*

English I						
Units	Engaging Students' thinking		Guiding students' thinking		Expanding students' thinking	
	General topics	Social issues	General topics	Social issues	General topics	Social issues
1	✓		✓		✓	
2		✓		✓	✓	
3	✓			✓		✓
4	✓		✓		✓	
5		✓		✓	✓	
6	✓		✓		✓	
7	✓		✓		✓	
8		✓		✓		✓
English II						
Units	Engaging Students' thinking		Guiding students' thinking		Expanding students' thinking	
	General topics	Social issues	General topics	Social issues	General topics	Social issues
1		✓		✓		✓
2		✓		✓		✓
3		✓		✓		✓
4	✓			✓		✓
5	✓			✓	✓	
6		✓		✓		✓
7		✓		✓		✓
8		✓		✓		✓

Regarding English II, Units 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 contained activities with central themes connected to social issues across all three stages of critical literacy pedagogy. Unit 4 included activities related to social issues in both the guiding and expanding stages. However, Unit 5 contained only a reading text in the guiding stage that seemed to address social issues.

Table 4 summarized all the units from both textbooks that reflected the three core features of critical literacy pedagogy as well as the activities relevant to societal concerns.

Feature 1: Engaging Students' Thinking

It was found that every unit in both textbooks contained activities designed to engage students' thinking through lead-in sections, which consistently appeared on the first page of every unit. These lead-in activities typically featured some pictures and discussion questions aimed at capturing students' interests, activating their prior knowledge, involving them in the lessons, and setting the stage for the units' content.

Figure 2

An Example of an Activity from English I that Engages Students' Thinking

Instructions: The pictures below represent advantages and disadvantages of playing video games. What are they? Compare your opinions with your classmates.



Picture 1 _____



Picture 2 _____



Picture 3 _____



Picture 4 _____

Several lead-in activities in English I focused on general or personal topics such as matching the pictures of famous persons with their names, taking the quiz how much they knew about AI, indicating the amount of

money students spend on each activity, and so on. However, English II contained a greater number of lead-in activities that addressed social concerns such as quizzes on how much plastic the world used, how much students knew about road safety, predictions about what students thought Bangkok would be like 20 years from now, and discussions on what made a city a better or worse place to live.

Figure 3

An Example of an Activity from English II that Engages Students' Thinking

A. What do you know about inequality?



Source: sk on Unsplash

Directions: Match the words (A-F) to their closest definitions (1-6). It will help if you start with the easiest ones first. Only use a dictionary if you have to.

A. Inequality	
B. Poor	
C. Wealth	
D. Asset	
E. Income	
F. Investments	

1. something which a person or company owns which can be used to pay for things
 2. a large amount of money and other assets a person, company or country has
 3. some people having more money and opportunities than others
 4. a person or country that doesn't have much wealth
 5. putting time and money into something to make more money
 6. the amount of money people earn from their jobs or other investments

The following paragraphs illustrated some activities from both textbooks that engaged students in thinking about social issues.

As for English I, the eighth unit which focused on the topic of video games contained a warm-up activity shown in Figure 2 that solicited students for their opinions about the pros and cons of playing video games. A topic can prompt discussion about broader social and behavioral impacts.

Regarding English II, Unit 6 allowed students to voice their opinions on what they knew about inequality shown in Figure 3. Furthermore, students were asked to complete a vocabulary-matching activity in which they paired key terms related to inequality with their definitions. This activity improved students' lexical knowledge while simultaneously introducing them to essential social concepts.

Feature 2: Guiding Students' Thinking

Both textbooks included the activities aimed at guiding students' thinking during the reading process. Prior to the main text in each unit, several reading strategies were introduced to support students' comprehension such as skimming the texts to locate the main idea, scanning the texts to find some specific information, using context clue to guess the meaning of the vocabulary, seeking pronoun references, making inference, and so on. These strategies prompted students to anticipate content, understand text organization, and achieve reading comprehension goals. Besides, guiding questions were provided to further enhance students' understandings of the texts. However, some reading texts in English I primarily focused on general or personal issues such as a brief story of Jack Ma, instructions on making a straw roller coaster, the six styles of love, and so forth. Nonetheless, all reading texts of English II were centered on social issues such as going green, road accidents in Thailand, inequality in Thailand, a smart city, etc.

The following examples showed how activities from each textbook guided students' thinking in connection with social issues and power relations.

Regarding English I, an activity from Unit 8 presented in Figure 4 asked students to infer the closest meaning of a phrase by selecting from multiple-choice options. This task supported students in developing inference skills by prompting them to draw logical conclusions based on prior knowledge and textual clues.

In the sixth unit of English II, the activity designed to guide students' thinking as shown in Figure 5 asked students to read the text about inequality in Thailand. Students were also prompted to ponder over the writer's opinion, with the activity requiring them to identify the writer's stance from a set of given options. This task encouraged students to engage with the text critically by distinguishing between factual content and the writer's point of view.

Figure 4

An Example of an Activity from English I that Guides Students' Thinking

8.3.1 Making inference

A. Instructions: Read the phrase below and answer the questions.

Surprising Health Benefits of Playing Video Games

1. Which of the following has the closest meaning to the phrase in the box?
 - a. Playing video games is beneficial to our health.
 - b. Video games have been considered harmful for players for decades.
 - c. Video games are more beneficial than other types of games.
2. Which of the following can be concluded from the phrase in the box?
 - a. Playing video games is beneficial to our health.
 - b. Video games have been considered harmful for players for decades.
 - c. Video games are more beneficial than other types of games.
3. Which of the following does not have the closest meaning to and can't be concluded from the phrase in the box?
 - a. Playing video games is beneficial to our health.
 - b. Video games have been considered harmful for players for decades.
 - c. Video games are more beneficial than other types of games.

- * Inference is a conclusion based on evidence AND reasoning.
- * Making inferences is to guess about what you do not know BY USING what you know.
- * To make inferences while reading, readers use information presented in the text AND background knowledge they have to figure out information that isn't directly presented in the text.

Feature 3: Expanding Students' Thinking

Both textbooks consisted of several activities that encouraged students to think beyond the texts they read and the stories they heard. English II offered a greater number of activities that addressed social issues compared to English I. Plenty of the expanding activities in English I were not directly related to social issues. These activities included speaking tasks that involved describing students' role models, planning a simple DIY project, sharing ideas on how to survive a whole week with just 500 baht, considering the most important factors for choosing a partner, etc. However, English II featured more socially oriented discussion prompts such as how students made an effort to be more eco-friendly in the future, how they could address problems related to inequality in Thai community, how they could improve cities and so forth.

Figure 5

An Example of an Activity from English II that Guides Students' Thinking

A. Identify the writer's opinion

Directions: Read the passage quickly and identify the writer's opinion. Ignore the bold words and any other unknown vocabulary.

Is Thailand Really the Third Most Unequal Country?

According to the author it depends on what you are measuring and how.

1. According to an article in the Bangkok Post, which **quotes a report** from a Swiss bank, Credit Suisse, Thailand is the world's third most unequal country after India and Russia. The report looked at the **concentration** of wealth in the richest 1% of the population and the results were 74.5%, 58.4% and 58% for Russia, India and Thailand. Despite this my research on the issue has not found another report which has Thailand so high on an **inequality index**.
2. The problem of inequality is not always **related** to the size or strength of a country's economy. India and Russia have strong emerging economies and are part of the so-called BRICS economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Thailand has one of the largest economies in ASEAN and was at one time **considered** an Asian tiger economy. The US which is the world's largest economy is the 41st most unequal out of 156 measured according to one report and more unequal than Thailand.
3. There are various reports which try to **measure** inequality around the world. One of these is the GINI report which looks at the **distribution** of wealth in a country. According to one of these reports by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Thailand is only the 44th most unequal country behind the US, Singapore and Malaysia among many others. Another is the Palma ratio which uses a similar technique to that used by

The opinion of the writer is that.....

- a. Thailand is the third most unequal country in the world by all measures.
- b. The US is less unequal than Thailand by all measures.
- c. Rich Western countries are all less unequal than Thailand by all measures.
- d. Thailand is not the third most unequal country by many measures.

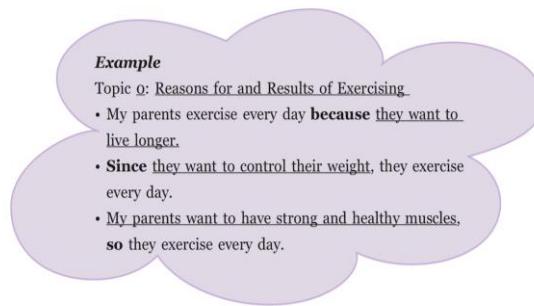
Figure 6 presented the activity of the eighth unit. In the post reading stage, students were asked to reflect on social issues using connectors such as *because, since, for, so, thus, hence* that were the grammatical focus of the unit to write sentences showing the reasons and results from the topics provided. These topics were closely linked to students' real-life experiences, for they encouraged them to think critically and express their opinions meaningfully.

Figure 6

An Example of an Activity from English I that Expands Students' Thinking

Instructions: In small groups, choose one of the given topics and brainstorm the reasons and/or results. Then write them down in the space provided using all three cause-effect connectors.

- Topic 1: The Reasons for and the Effects of Playing Online Games
- Topic 2: Why So Many People Eat Too Much Junk Food & The Results of Eating Too Much Junk Food
- Topic 3: The Causes and Effects of Not Getting Enough Sleep
- Topic 4: The Causes and Effects of Getting a Cold



Regarding English II, the activity presented in Figure 7 showed that after reading the assigned text, students were asked to articulate both the problems and possible solutions related to the inequality in Thai society. To support their responses, the activity provided many prompts in the form of keywords related to common problems and corresponding solutions. This task not only deepened students' understanding of the topic but also encouraged them to think critically and express their thoughts about real-world social issues through spoken language.

Figure 7

An Example of an Activity from English II That Expands Students' Thinking

A. Problems and solutions related to inequality in Thai society

Directions: Work in groups of 3 to 5. Below are some of the problems and solutions related to inequality we have already read and heard about in this unit as well as some new ones. In your groups decide which ones you think affect Thailand the most then decide which solutions are most appropriate for each problem. Your teacher may ask you to present your opinions at the end of the activity so try to think of reasons to back them up. You may also be given extra credit for ideas of your own.

Problems

- Income inequality
- Gender Inequality (men and women for the purposes of this activity)
- Unequal treatment of immigrants
- Unequal treatment of Muslims especially in southern Thailand
- Unequal treatment of the LGBTQ community
- Unequal treatment of disabled people
- Unequal treatment of older people
- Unequal treatment of people from regional areas such as the north, north east, south etc.
- Anything else you can think of

Solutions

- Laws to protect minority groups
- Laws to protect different religions
- Making only the rich pay more tax
- Making everyone in society pay a fair amount of tax with the rich paying the most
- Making very rich people and companies pay tax (closing tax loopholes)
- Provide equal employment opportunities for LGBTQ community
- Allowing old people to work for longer
- Providing equal education and employment opportunities for disabled people
- Providing better education and other opportunities for people in regional areas
- Official recognition of regional languages in Thailand e.g. Isan and Lanna
- Anything else you can think of

Discussion and Conclusion

Never has literacy pedagogy been considered to be neutral, for literacy is shaped by underlying political agendas (Mills, 2016). Textbook development is regulated by the governmental authorities, which influences the content and direction of language education (Wongsantativanich et al.,

2018). Language learning that merely focuses on the functional language skills and the rhetoric of standard English is insufficient to help students uncover the political dimensions embedded within literacy learning. To accommodate the linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, it is essential to take further steps in the development of English textbooks and curricula that are grounded in critical literacy. Such materials should actively engage students in conversation with texts and foster critical reflection on how to approach conflicts, social issues, and power relations in society with peaceful and constructive means.

Instructional activities that reflect the core practices of critical literacy pedagogy encourage students to reflect on social issues, think critically through different points of view, and appreciate different cultural voices of persons whose backgrounds are different. What's more, students are allowed to not only read the word but also the world (Janks, 2013). That is to say, learning becomes a process that provides an opportunity to make meaning and tackle the real-world issues.

Classroom activities designed around critical literacy pedagogy offers a transformative perspective on English language teaching that needs to go far beyond the traditional goal of teaching English solely for communicative purposes. Engaging in activities that align with critical literacy pedagogy is considered necessary, for it empowers students to interrogate writers, engage in thoughtful discussion, examine texts critically, and contemplate how historical, cultural and political contexts shape meaning. Such pedagogy equips students with analytic tools and textual production knowledge necessary to envision and advocate for a more socially just future. In addition, it challenges the status quo and fosters a heightened awareness of the social, cultural, and political inequalities that impact marginalized communities (Janks, 2014; Luke, 2014; Mills, 2016). Furthermore, critical literacy pedagogy linguistically empowers students, prepare them to listen to diverse perspectives, articulate their thoughts, pose critical questions, take cognizance of social problems and socially unjust phenomenon, and develop the capacity to address them constructively and peacefully (Adunyarittigun, 2017).

However, implementing critical literacy pedagogy in the English foundation courses presents considerable challenges, for students enrolled in these courses often require some basic knowledge and exposure to English to develop their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Most reading and listening tasks in these courses are designed at the comprehension level. However, these tasks become difficult for a number of Thai students whose level of English proficiency remain at a low to intermediate level and who have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. Given that Thai citizens primarily use Thai in their daily lives, the language barrier poses a significant obstacle to achieving critical engagement with English texts.

Despite that, there remains a potential to integrate elements of critical literacy into English language teaching. Although full implementation may be difficult for students at lower proficiency levels, incorporating critical literacy into reading and listening cycles can be a meaningful starting point. These activities can create some spaces for students to use the English language to explore themes such as ethics, fairness, discourse and identity, values and action as well as scrupulously investigate the possible social effects of different positions. Engaging students in critical thinking, even at an introductory level, may become an initial step in fostering critical literacy among Thai EFL students whose language barrier is one of the major obstacles in expressing their critical perspectives in English. However, it remains vital to help students become successful English communicators. While building communicative competence is preponderant, supporting students in expressing their critical thoughts in English is an equally significant goal that leads to their development as socially aware communicators.

Pedagogical Implications

This study holds significant implications for textbook writers and curriculum developers. It can be regarded as a guideline for mapping out the critical literacy lessons and developing English instructional materials that aim to cultivate critical English language learners who are better prepared to navigate unjust circumstances they might encounter in their real lives. In addition, this research may impact English language teachers by emphasizing that reading texts focused solely on comprehension questions seem to be inadequate for helping students become critical readers. Possibly English language teachers need to meticulously review, redesign, and reconstruct English texts to actively involve students in discussing, criticizing, and voicing their opinions on what the texts are omitted and kept silent, and how the texts produce the social and cultural biases in terms of race, gender, classes, ages, geography, beliefs, values, and other social dimensions.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research employed a framework that analyzed only the surface level of critical literacy. Thus, a deeper level of analysis using alternative theoretical frameworks is recommended for future research. Additionally, interviews with textbook writers and users may be necessary to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of critical literacy pedagogy and its potential advantages for Thai students. Besides, investigating Thai students' perceptions of critical pedagogy activities is of great importance, for it may

provide additional perspectives and valuable insights for developing and refining English courses and teaching materials.

About the Author

Phachara Saiphet: An assistant professor at the Language Institute of Thammasat University in Thailand. His research interests include autoethnography, critical applied linguistics, critical literacies, decoloniality, linguistic imperialism, linguistic racism, and narrative inquiry.

Endnotes

¹O-NET stands for the Ordinary National Educational Test. It is a Thai standardized test for all Thai grade 12 students. The O-NET consists of five subjects including Math, English, Thai, Social studies, and Science. Thai students use these scores as part of the selection criteria for admission to Thai university.

²U-GET PBT refers to a paper-based university general English test designed to assess English language proficiency.

³U-GET CBT refers to a computer-based university general English test.

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