Effectiveness of Reading Short Stories to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence among Thai students at an International School

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Abstract

This research investigated the effectiveness of reading short stories to develop three particular dimensions of Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence (ICC): interpreting and identifying; comparing and relating; and attitude and openness. The study utilized a twelve-session design, and analyzed the cultural themes of three short stories written by and about native English speakers (NES). Data was collected through a mixed-method approach and included pre- and posttests, and semi-structured interviews. The participants were ten secondary-one (grade 7) students at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. Results indicated that reading and discussing short stories helped develop ICC in all three of the dimensions studied. By far, the largest increases recorded occurred in the students' interpreting and identifying abilities, while relatively small increases were seen in both the comparing and relating dimension and the attitude and openness dimension. Despite the small increases, some students reported that reading short stories broadened their means for comparing and relating; and their preexisting openness to NES cultures helps explain their low development of the attitude dimension. Consequently, this paper puts forward that EFL teachers in Thailand should utilize short stories mindfully, i.e., to focus specifically on those aspects of ICC deemed most crucial to their students.

Key words: Thailand, short stories, Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), International schools, English as a foreign language (EFL)

Introduction

Byram (1997) posits that language students must develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in addition to linguistic skills. According to Byram (1997), ICC is comprised of five dimensions: skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and interaction; knowledge; intercultural attitudes; and critical cultural awareness. In any given context, at least one of the five dimensions is required "for communicating effectively and appropriately across cultures in a foreign language" (Ottoson, 2016). Byram's ICC demonstrates the belief that language learning is underpinned by culture, as the latter imbues itself in one's emotions, cognition and identity (Brown and Lee, 2015). Hence, in addition to linguistics instruction, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) must also fulfill the role of professional mediator between first and second language cultures (Brown, 1994).

In Thailand, the need for teachers to act as professional mediators is evidenced in the Ministry of Education's (MOE) 2008 Basic Core Curriculum's Language and Culture Strand. Standard F2.1 states that students must learn to appreciate relationships between the language and culture of native English speakers (NES) and the capacity for use of language appropriate to occasions and places; additionally, Standard F2.2 directs students to appreciate similarities

and differences between the language and culture of NES and Thai speakers, and capacity for correct and appropriate use of language. Thus, because Thai students of English must also learn to appreciate NES cultures as part of their studies, it is worthwhile to investigate how, through Byram's ICC framework, this can best be accomplished.

Previous studies have already shown that reading literary texts engender skills aligned with Byram's theory of ICC: for example, Rezaei and Naghibian (2018) cite Ghosn (2002) in explaining that literature engenders ICC because it is attention-grabbing and realistic, while also promoting critical thinking through use of all four English skills. Short stories are also said to engender ICC, as they promote empathy in readers who try to identify with characters and understand their motivations (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013). Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate how short stories, written by and about NES, foster understanding of ICC among Thai EFL students at an international school in Bangkok.

Short stories are especially useful in EFL environments, as they are not only relatively brief, but more accessible given their typical singular plots (Gomez, 2012). Moreover, short stories written by and about NES abound, and thus enable teachers to effectively match texts with their students proficiency levels (Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). Thus, due to their concise nature, as well as their accessibility to students of varying English proficiencies, short stories aid in providing "comprehensible input:" that which students must already understand linguistically, in order to facilitate conceptual development through the varying contexts of the stories (Yang, 2009).

For the researcher, this project merges both his academic background in literature with his professional experiences teaching EFL students in Thailand. Over the years, his primary role in Thai EFL settings has not simply been instruction in English and literature, but to provide Thai students access to a NES as well. And as the supply of NES teachers does not always meet demand—even in schools where one or more NES is staffed—short stories by and about NES may serve Thai EFL students in developing ICC. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how short stories can be utilized to fill the need for NES in Thai classrooms, and in the process also meet the MOE's requirements through Byram's conceptual framework for ICC.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which reading short stories impacts Thai international school students' development of ICC.
2. To examine students' overall opinions toward NES cultures, as well as in comparison to Thai culture.

Research Questions

1. Among Thai international school students, to what extent does reading short stories evidence development of ICC?
2. What are the students' opinions toward reading short stories as a means to broaden their ICC?

Review of Literature

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), as defined by Lazar (2003), means the ability to interact successfully with people from other cultures, and this requires one to consider and deal with their own cultural tendencies as well. Since Byram (1997) first introduced ICC, his model has enabled English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and students alike to better appreciate similarities and differences between each other's cultures (Moya & Ortiz, 2016). This is crucial, as a mutually informing relationship exists between language and culture,

particularly in the context of teaching a foreign language (Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018). Therefore, to focus on linguistic acquisition alone is inhibitive to the learning process: to provide EFL students a fuller opportunity for mastery, it is also necessary to consider the attitudes and beliefs underpinning the culture of English's native speakers (Zhu, 2011).

Byram's ICC model (1997) is comprised of five dimensions: knowledge; skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and/or interaction; attitude – relativizing self; and critical cultural awareness, as pertains to education and politics of a people. Mesa-Hoyos et al, (2019) define the knowledge dimension as the understanding one possesses of differing social groups within one's own culture, or in other cultures with regard to interaction among one another or with the broader society as a whole. Skills of interpreting and relating are defined by Vo (2017) as the ability to both recognize and explain cultural viewpoints, as well as to apply them in a cultural context differing to one's own. Additionally, according to Vo (2017), the other ICC skillset—that of discovery and/or interaction—is defined by one's ability to gain new understanding of a culture, including its practices, and apply them in real time. Zheng (2014) states that the attitude dimension involves the students perspective toward other cultures, which includes not only awareness but also sensitivity toward any differences arising in varying cultural contexts; furthermore, the student must show adaptability to these differences. Vos (2018) explains critical cultural awareness as the understanding of the perspectives from which judgements are formed and ultimately made. Vos (2018) further states that because it first requires competency in the other four aspects of ICC, critical cultural awareness is seen as the culmination of the ICC process.

As effective ICC requires not only the ability to interact with people from diverse cultures, but the means as well, it is crucial to provide access through authentic materials, especially when native speakers are unavailable (Gomez, 2012). Facciol & Kjartansson (2003) suggests that the integration of literary texts is useful where direct access to native speakers is limited (Owczarek, 2016). This is true according to Thomlinson and Masuhara (2004) because literature promotes reflection of oneself and thus understanding of one's similarities and differences with those from other cultures (Singh et al., 2017). In essence, such can be termed ICC—as reading allows construction of sociocultural images, including reflections of how others see the world; in addition, Singh et al. (2017) also state that literature fosters tolerance and open-mindedness toward others, i.e., develops empathy.

Fiction's ability to develop empathy in readers is what Pino and Mazza (2016) refer to as mentalizing ability; as to mentalize what others are thinking and feeling forms the basis for emotional sharing, i.e., engaging in a meaningful, heart-felt discussion with a speaker of another language. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) go further by suggesting that reading fiction allows students to learn more about themselves, and thus provides a means for comparison with others. Thus, because emotional sharing works to foster language acquisition, intriguing stories can help to enable this dynamic in classrooms absent of NES (Yang, 2009).

Isikli & Tarakcioglu (2017) explain how plentiful English language literature is, such that texts exist to meet the needs of any level of foreign language learner. Such variety underscores how any English language texts, e.g., short stories, can and should be what Wajnryb (2003) termed comprehensible input, i.e., that which students can understand (Yang, 2009).

In choosing texts, EFL teachers must also consider how they will be used for assessment. Zheng (2014) argues that any of the components of ICC can be measured at any time, as well as in combination with each other: for example, EFL students can be assessed about the knowledge dimension alone, or the attitude or skills dimensions together. Like this, Zheng (2014) believes it possible to clearly define ICC for the classroom.

Past studies report evidence of both ICC awareness and skills development after reading literary texts. An intercultural reading program was utilized in Malaysia, for example,

to enhance intercultural knowledge, i.e., promote a broader worldview (Singh et.al, 2017). In one instance, after reading a short story involving an interracial marriage, students demonstrated in group discussions the ability to identify and interpret the cultural issues in the stories, including those of a sensitive nature.

What's more, in a study by Rezaei and Naghibian (2018), thirteen Iranian students read a dozen short stories written by prominent American authors. All thirteen students reported increases in their comparing and relating dimension. Specifically, greater self-awareness of Iranian culture was developed as a result of comparing it with that of the American characters in the stories.

In a Colombian study, Moya, et.al, (2016) had seventy-five students read and discuss literature in order to explore different countries and their cultures. With regard to attitude and openness, s tudents reported themselves as more curious about others, i.e., open to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Moya's findings also suggest that, through literature, ICC and respect for others may develop in tandem.

Methodology

Context of Study
The international school at which the study took place is an official Cambridge testing school, which offers kindergarten, primary, secondary and junior college classes. The school's curriculum is based in part on the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), which is administered by Cambridge University, and is promoted as a highly regarded alternative to national curriculums the world over.

The middle school grades align with the rest of the school, insofar as over ninety percent of the student body are native Thai. For this reason, English can be said to function as an additional language for them, which is why they receive daily instruction amounting to five and half hours per week. Furthermore, beyond their banded English language classes, secondary students receive two hours of instruction per week in English literature. These latter classes are organized by the students' homerooms and are thus mixed-level. Of the three classes, sizes range between fifteen and seventeen students.

Participants
The population of secondary-one (grade 7) students was forty-eight, all aged from twelve to thirteen years-old. At the start of the year, students were assigned to one of three homerooms by the administration. The homeroom randomly chosen for the study contained nineteen mixed-ability students. From the nineteen, the sample size was selected by purposive sampling, via diagnostic English scores generated through a Cambridge Assessment rubric. To take part in the study, a student had to score at least the equivalent of B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference(CEFR). The reasoning for this was to help control for any lack of ICC development resulting from difficulty in reading texts themselves, as past research shows that in order to be effective, any literary source material must be assessable for the students in question (Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017). In total, ten Thai students took part in the study—five boys and five girls.

Research Instruments
Three experts evaluated the content validity of the study's objectives, materials, procedures and activities, and evaluation criteria. In total, eighteen items were evaluated on an Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index scale, and earned an overall reliability score of .917.

The pretest contained four questions in total: one multiple-choice question with an additional short answer section for explanation, as well as two standalone short answer questions. The posttest also contained four questions, but with a slightly different format: two

standalone short answer questions, one multiple choice with an additional short answer section, and one standalone multiple-choice question. For example, on the pretest for the story "Boys and Girls," students were asked how significant traditional gender roles still are in Thai culture compared to in NES cultures. One student answered that traditional gender roles remain more significant in Thailand, and supported that view through how Thai women are expected to talk softly to others, and show politeness through use of the particle 'ka' at the end of sentences. This answer was scored a 4, as it made use of a real-life example, but lacked the detail explanation needed to score 5 or above.

Pretest and posttest intercultural content: the pretest was constructed based on the aforementioned MOE Language and Culture Standards in combination with Byram's theory of ICC as it relates to skills of interpreting, comparing, and attitudes. (The other two ICC skills—knowledge and critical cultural awareness—were omitted, as the latter was thought too esoteric for discussion by secondary-one students, while the former required too much simultaneous analysis of oneself, such that it could prove distractive and/or overwhelming for secondary-one students already tasked with analyzing literary texts.) Thus, for each cultural topic, students had to interpret, compare, and analyze aspects of NES culture. The posttests were based on the same framework as the pretest, and thus duplicated them as well with regard to criteria assessed; the difference being that in the posttests, the participants were tasked with referencing the story they read in order to answer.

Adapted ICC rubric: as previously mentioned, the rubric was an amalgamation based on Thailand MOE Standards for "appreciating" language and culture—i.e., to interpret, compare, analyze—and Byram's theory of ICC as it relates to skills of interpreting and comparing, and attitudes. Byram's model has significant advantages, as it names clear objectives (Zheng, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews: the interviews revolved around three questions related to the students' experiences reading the texts, and specifically their own self-reported development of ICC through reading short stories. The four questions were as follows: 1) On a scale of *0 to 5*, how has analyzing short stories in class made you more mindful of culture? 2) Do you think that reading short stories written by and about NES will help you better identify aspects of NES cultures? 3) Has reading short stories written by and about NES made you more aware of your own culture by comparison? 4) Did the short stories we read change your feeling toward NES peoples and cultures?

Instructional Instruments

Three short stories were selected based on having been written by well-known NES authors, and by being thematically multicultural, i.e., universal in theme. The former was decided through choosing stories first published in the early and mid-twentieth century, but which—as confirmed through online searches of courses and curriculums—are still commonly taught today.

Appropriate, i.e., accessible, themes were derived through class votes to determine which, if any, were already-familiar to students due to encountering them in their daily lives. The results led to the selection of the following three themes: gift giving; gender roles; and social standing. Thus, with regard to theme, the following stories were chosen respectively: *The Gift of the Magi*, by O. Henry*; Boys and Girls*, by Alice Munroe; *The Dollhouse*, by Katherine Mansfield. The approximate word counts for the aforementioned stories were, respectively, as follows: 1,900, 6,400, and 3,300. Furthermore, the suitability of each story was measured via Flesch-Kincaid readability tests: passages from each story were pasted into software which then determined the minimum grade level required for the students to comprehend them. Both "The Doll House" and "Gift of the Magi" were rated at 4th grade, while "Boys and Girls" was rated at a 6th grade level for readability.

Lesson plans were organized into three stages: prereading; while-reading; and post-reading. The pre-reading instructional instruments consisted of lessons explaining any pertinent information related to the stories that would not otherwise be explained directly in them; for example, historical, religious and other social underpinnings. Accordingly, instruction followed as necessary to clarify how the aforesaid might impact a story's characters, whether in speech, action or thought.

While-reading instructional instruments consisted of printouts of each story for the students to annotate. Students were placed into groups and assigned one of the three ICC aspects—identifying, comparing, and attitude; knowledge was later synthesized via class-wide discussion. Firstly, through discussion of their annotations, students connected their pre-reading knowledge to the text itself. For example, in *Boys and Girls* students were asked to identify examples of masculine and feminine stereotypes, as first discussed on the prereading worksheet; in *Gift of the Magi*, students annotated any words and/or actions by the characters that seemed foreign to them culturally, in order to compare and contrast; in *The Dollhouse,* students made annotations for how they empathized with the characters, i.e., when they were being bullied.

Post-reading instructional instruments: questions were given which allowed the students to discuss the identifying, comparing, and attitude aspects of ICC within each story. Like this, when they took their posttests, they had had an opportunity to developed the knowhow for their answers. For example, with regard to the identifying aspect of ICC, students were asked if their society, and especially their parents, forced gender roles on them the same way the narrator's parents did in the story *Boys and Girls*. Additionally, for the comparing aspect of ICC, students were asked how their society related to the one in *The Dollhouse*, and whether people who show off their possessions—not only in real life, but through social media—are truly respected by others. For assessing the attitude aspect of ICC, students were asked to share their feelings about characters actions—for example: How did you feel about the characters in *Gift of the Magi* showing their love through buying presents they couldn't really afford?

Data Collection

Throughout the study, data collection procedures remained uniform. For each short story, two weeks were spent, including the time needed for both the pre- and posttests. Each two-week period consisted of four 45-minute classes, and thus totaled 180 minutes of face-to-face instruction. Outside of class, students were tasked with conducting additional readings of specific passages, all of which were chosen to focus on developing ICC, as well as aid discussion for the upcoming class.

Class 1: the first Fifteen minutes was allotted for the pretest, and proved sufficient time for the students to answer each question without having to rush. The remainder of class addressed the theme in question, and consisted of prereading exercises. For example, for the story "Boys and Girls," students did a worksheet on gender stereotypes which consisted of a self-assessment. Opposing stereotypes—e.g., tough vs. gentle—were placed on a sliding scale of 1 to 5, from which a total score was derived to determine the extent to which a student fit his or her gender stereotype.

Class 2: the first reading was read aloud by the teacher, while students read along silently. Like this, students were better able to keep pace with one another. Students were then given worksheets containing ICC discussion questions. They were directed to familiarize themselves with the questions, but to hold off writing down any answers. For homework, students were assigned specific passages to reread and annotate, in order to aid focus in their discussions for Class 3.

Class 3: Students worked in groups of four and discussed the ICC questions on the

worksheet. The teacher walked around from group to group and guided the discussions as necessary. In preparation for classwide discussion, each group was assigned a question to present about first.

Class 4: Classwide discussion completed: remaining groups presented their answers for a particular discussion question, to which other groups were tasked with replying. Students were then given twenty minutes to complete the posttest.

Finally, three students were chosen at random to be interviewed about the study. Interviews took place the following week, outside regular class hours. All three students were interviewed alone, though the interviews were given on the same day, one right after the other. This way, no one student could know ahead of time what questions would be asked.

Table 1: ICC Assessment Rubric

	NA/U	Beginning	Progressing	Mastering	Exceeding
	0	1 -2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 – 8
Interpreting / identifying	No answer or unintelligible	Fails or mostly fails to identify any key event or aspect of NES culture, or is only able to mention its existence but not expound on it any further.	Identifies a key event or aspect of NES culture, but is limited in the ability to expound on it, *or* connect it back to the text that was read.	Expounds on key event/ aspect of NES cultures. Example provided from real life, or, when applicable, from the text.	Student identifies multiple events or aspects of NES cultures through real-life examples, or, where applicable, numerous perspectives from the story.
Comparing / relating	No answer or unintelligible	Fails or mostly fails to compare or relate key event / aspect of NES culture with Thai culture.	Compares or relates key event / aspect of NES culture with Thai culture. Uses real-life example, or example from the text when applicable.	Compares or relates key event / aspect of NES culture with Thai culture, and provides detailed example from real life, or from the text when applicable.	Compares or relates multiple events and aspects of NES culture with Thai culture using multiple in-depth examples from either real life or the text when applicable.
Attitude and openness to learning	No answer or unintelligible	Rejects, or mostly rejects, NES cultural values. Regards Thai culture as objectively superior. *And/or* expresses no curiosity to learn about NES cultures.	Somewhat rejects NES cultural values, but allows they may be all right for others. *And/or* minimal to some curiosity expressed to learn more about NES cultures.	Accepts NES cultural values as valid, and in some cases advantageous; and/or expresses curiosity and openness to learning more about NES cultures.	Strong desire expressed to learn about NES cultures. *And/or*, own culture deemed relative; no ethnocentricity.

The ICC rubric ranged from scores of 0 to 8 and consisted of four categories: No answer; Beginning; Progressing; Mastering; and Exceeding. Additionally, each category was defined by two possible scores. For example, a student assessed as "Progressing" could score either 3 or 4. The lower score of 3 indicated that some of the criteria had been met, while a score of 4 indicated that all criteria had been met. This range within a particular category allowed for a more detailed assessment.

Pretest: the students were tasked with completing a pretest on the three aspects of ICC, as each pertained to the specific theme from each short story: *Gift of the Magi* / gift giving; *The Dollhouse* / social class; and *Boys and Girls* / traditional gender roles. The pretests were assessed with the adapted ICC rubric, which measured three skills—interpreting, comparing, and analyzing. Additionally, the three scores were added together for an overall score.

Posttest: The second formal assessment via rubric took place during post-reading, which consisted of a posttest similar to the pretest the students took, but with questions specific to the short story being analyzed. As with the pretest, three ICC skills were measured—interpreting, comparing, and analyzing. Additionally, the three scores were added together for an overall score.

Interviews: numbers were assigned to each of the ten students, then randomly selected to determine which three who would take part in the interviews. Afterward, the interviews were transcribed to assess any repeating themes.

Data Analysis

A fellow teacher in the English department also assessed the pre- and posttests: inter-rater reliability exceeded ninety-one percent. The quantitative data derived from the three pretest topics was entered into a spreadsheet and used for comparison with the posttest results. This was done using percentages, as well as descriptive statistics, e.g., means and standard deviation. Thus, the three ICC scores derived through the pretest were measured against those of the posttest to assess the extent of ICC development.

The analysis was carried out in four ways: pretest scores for each of the three dimensions of ICC were measured and compared to the scores derived from the posttest for each of the same dimensions. Additionally, the overall group score from the pretest was compared to the same for the posttest.

Qualitative Data: three students were chosen for semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Any recurring themes, or anomalies, were noted.

Results

Table 2: Overall Development of ICC

Student	Story 1		Story 2		Story 3		Total		% Change (each student)
	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (72)	PostTest (72)	
1	12	16	9	12	9	12	30	40	33.33
2	14	17	11	17	13	16	38	50	31.58
3	13	16	16	17	12	14	41	47	14.63
4	10	18	14	17	12	18	36	53	47.22
5	11	13	10	10	15	13	36	36	0.00
6	9	9	10	12	8	8	27	29	7.41
7	9	17	11	9	10	12	30	38	26.67
8	13	13	8	9	12	10	33	32	-3.03

Student	Story 1		Story 2		Story 3		Total		% Change (each student)
	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (24)	PostTest (24)	PreTest (72)	PostTest (72)	
9	3	7	11	8	10	13	24	28	16.67
10	9	13	7	11	12	11	28	35	25.00
Total	103	139	107	122	113	127	323	388	19.95
Mean (SD)	10.3 (3.16)	13.9 (3.92)	10.7 (2.67)	12.2 (3.55)	11.3 (2.06)	12.7 (2.87)	32.3 (5.40)	38.8 (9.06)	17.78
% Change (Sample)	34.95		14.02		12.39		20.12		

Overall, students' ICC increased with an average of 20.12% (SD 15.82), with the highest percentage change in Story 1 of 34.95%, followed by Story 2 with 14.02%, and Story 3 with 12.39%. At the individual level, 8 of 10 students demonstrated a rise in ICC.

Table 3: The Development of the Identifying and Interpreting Dimension

Student	Story 1			Story 2			Story 3			Total		
	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest	PostTest	% Change
1	3	5	66.67	2	3	50.00	2	3	50.00	7.00	11.00	57.14
2	3	7	133.33	3	5	66.67	4	5	25.00	10.00	17.00	70.00
3	3	6	100.00	5	5	0.00	4	5	25.00	12.00	16.00	33.33
4	2	7	250.00	4	5	25.00	5	6	20.00	11.00	18.00	63.64
5	3	4	33.33	2	2	0.00	5	4	-20.00	10.00	10.00	0.00
6	3	4	33.33	2	2	0.00	1	3	200.00	6.00	9.00	50.00
7	3	5	66.67	1	1	0.00	3	4	33.33	7.00	10.00	42.86
8	4	5	25.00	1	3	200.00	2	3	50.00	7.00	11.00	57.14
9	1	4	300.00	3	3	0.00	2	4	100.00	6.00	11.00	83.33
10	1	4	300.00	1	3	200.00	3	3	0.00	5.00	10.00	100.00
Total	26.00	51.00	96.15	24.00	32.00	33.33	31.00	40.00	29.03	81.00	123.00	51.85
Mean (SD)	2.60 (0.10)	5.10 (1.20)		2.40 (1.35)	3.20 (1.40)		3.10 (1.37)	4.00 (1.05)		8.10 2.42)	12.30 (3.33)	

Overall, students' identifying and interpreting skills increased with an average 51.85% (SD 27.48). In story 1, students increased the most with an average of 96.15% (SD 100.98), followed by Story 2 with an average of 33.33% (SD 80.44) and Story 3 with an average of 29.03% (SD 62.18).

Table 4: The Development of the Comparing and Relating Dimension

Student	Story 1			Story 2			Story 3			Total		
	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest	PostTest	% Change
1	2	4	100.00	2	3	50.00	2	3	50.00	6.00	10.00	66.67
2	4	4	0.00	3	5	66.67	4	5	25.00	11.00	14.00	27.27
3	4	4	0.00	4	4	0.00	3	4	33.33	11.00	12.00	9.09
4	3	5	66.67	3	4	33.33	3	5	66.67	9.00	14.00	55.56
5	3	4	33.33	3	3	0.00	5	3	-40.00	11.00	10.00	-9.09
6	4	3	-25.00	3	3	0.00	3	3	0.00	10.00	9.00	-10.00
7	3	6	100.00	3	3	0.00	3	4	33.33	9.00	13.00	44.44
8	3	3	0.00	2	1	-50.00	4	2	-50.00	9.00	6.00	-33.33
9	2	3	50.00	3	1	-66.67	3	4	33.33	8.00	8.00	0.00
10	3	3	0.00	1	3	200.00	4	2	-50.00	8.00	8.00	0.00
Total	31.00	39.00	25.81	27.00	30.00	11.11	34.00	35.00	2.94	92.00	104.00	13.04
Mean (SD)	3.10 (0.74)	3.90 (0.99)		2.70 (0.82)	3.00 (1.25)		3.40 (0.84)	3.50 (1.08)		9.20 (1.62)	10.40 (2.76)	

Overall, students' comparing and relating skills increased with an average of 13.04 % (SD 32.25). Story 1 saw students increase the most with an average of 25.81% (SD 44.87), followed by Story 2 with an average rise of 11.11% (SD 74.20) and Story 3 with an average of 2.94% (SD 42.78).

Table 5: The Development of the Attitude and Openness to Learning Dimension

Student	Story 1			Story 2			Story 3			Total		
	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest (8)	PostTest (8)	% Change	PreTest	PostTest	% Change
1	7	7	0.00	5	6	20.00	5	6	20.00	17.00	19.00	11.76
2	7	7	0.00	5	7	40.00	5	6	20.00	17.00	20.00	17.65
3	6	6	0.00	7	8	14.29	5	5	0.00	18.00	19.00	5.56
4	5	6	20.00	7	8	14.29	4	7	75.00	16.00	21.00	31.25
5	5	5	0.00	5	5	0.00	5	6	20.00	15.00	16.00	6.67
6	2	3	50.00	5	7	40.00	4	2	-50.00	11.00	12.00	9.09
7	3	6	100.00	7	5	-28.57	4	4	0.00	14.00	15.00	7.14
8	6	5	-16.67	5	5	0.00	6	5	-16.67	17.00	15.00	-11.76
9	0	0	0.00	5	4	-20.00	5	5	0.00	10.00	9.00	-10.00
10	5	6	20.00	5	5	0.00	5	6	20.00	15.00	17.00	13.33
Total	46.00	51.00	10.87	56.00	60.00	7.14	48.00	52.00	8.33	150.00	163.00	8.67
Mean (SD)	4.60 (2.27)	5.10 (2.13)		5.60 (0.97)	6.00 (1.41)		4.80 (0.63)	5.20 (1.40)		15.00 (2.67)	16.30 (3.74)	

Overall, students' attitude and openness skills increased with an average of 8.67% (SD 12.47). Story 1 saw students increase the most with an average of 10.87% (SD 34.28), followed by Story 2 with an average rise of 7.14% (SD 22.57) and Story 3 with an average of 8.33% (SD 12.47).

Interviews
Three students were chosen at random to be individually interviewed about the study. They were asked questions related to the three ICC dimensions being analyzed. The interviews were semi-structured, and all utilized the same four-question format to guide the conversation.

How a student answered any particular question would determine the follow-up questions he or she received. Nevertheless, the findings were categorized by the four main questions discussed, with the major themes for each being reported. The interviews also afforded greater insight into what was most impactful about the way the lessons were structured, e.g., how the prereading and post-reading lessons helped guide their understanding of culture in the stories.

On Mindfulness of Culture
Though all interviewees reported having been already mindful of culture, short stories were said to lend readers access to NES societies in a meaningful way. One student reported that they felt confident that they "would know what to do or not to do" with regard to gift giving, if they were in the United States during Christmas, for example. Furthermore, how characters spoke and behaved in the stories were seen as a means to understand NES culture more deeply than if conveyed through a typical informational lesson:

"Like, if [a teacher gives] us a list of bullet points about culture, we may not remember. But if they give us a story and we learn the plot of the story, then we can learn about the culture of the characters in more detail."

Thus, while culture itself may not have been explicitly mentioned in the stories, the fictional plots were seen to help the students mentalize the cultural underpinnings driving the characters.

On Identifying Aspects of NES Cultures in Real Life
Through the readings and post-reading discussions, students felt they had been exposed to NES culture: "I can think about the themes we learned in class and apply to real life and analyze real situations." This in turn lent the students an increased confidence for when they next interact with a NES outside of school: "I can know, like, what should I do and if I do wrong, then I can know how to fix it." Thus, the students not only felt they learned how to better identify aspects of NES cultures, but, thanks to having read and analyzed the short stories, also how to behave according to them in particular social situations.

On Comparing and Contrasting Cultures
Despite the relatively modest increase in test scores, what came up most in the interviews was the students' reported increase in ability to compare and contrast their own cultures with those of NES. Short stories written by and about NES were seen as providing a starting point for comparison with Thai culture:

"Like, I know my own culture, but . . . like you give a before and after, on the before I didn't get the culture yet, but after I got the story, after I felt what it's like to experience being there, I could compare differences and similarities."

Prereading and post-reading discussions may therefore be said to have aided in this increased confidence to compare and contrast. Prereading lessons were found to be especially helpful, as they allowed students to focus their attention on underlying details while reading, instead of only gleaming surface meaning.

On Attitudes and Openness toward NES Peoples and Cultures
All the students reported what can be termed as increased feelings of empathy toward the characters in the stories, and by extension NES peoples as well. The plots made the students feel as if they were experiencing the happenings in the stories themselves. This allowed a deeper understanding of the issues existing among NES peoples in their own societies. This aforesaid understanding evidences how readers were opened up to the inner worlds of the characters, and thus through empathy humanized them. One student remarked that reading a well written story was like gaining international experience even better than through travel: "Reading makes you think about what it's like to be there . . . I think reading stories will help convey more about the culture than going there because sometimes it takes time just to observe, but reading . . . you get the point of what they're trying to say . . . because the stories have a plot and set a tone, and as the story continues it makes you feel like you are a part of that plot, and it makes you feel more experience than if you were just watching." Thus, even though only minimal development was observed in attitude and openness overall, the stories did help some of the students to better empathize with NES. Moreover, for some students, the lack in rise of scores appears to have been due to their preexisting openness to NES cultures.

Discussion
This research utilized pre- and posttests, group and class-wide discussions, as well as semi-structured interviews; it examined the extent to which reading short stories written by and about NES contributed to ICC development among Thai EFL students at an international high school in Bangkok, Thailand. Among the sample, the findings showed a positive gain in overall development of ICC, as well as increases in each of the three individual dimensions studied. By far, the students evidenced the most progress in the Interpreting and Identifying dimension. The other two dimensions studied—Comparing and Relating, and Attitude and Openness—did not show, according to the rubric, a particularly significant increase in the students' ICC. For a clearer picture, then, it proved necessary to examine the findings for each story, for each individual aspect of ICC, as well as for any curious results among individual students.

Story 1—*Gift of the Magi*—saw an increase in ICC of 30.1%, and therefore proved the most effective in developing the students' ICC. This is arguably due to the benign nature of the theme of gift giving, compared to the more controversial issues of gender roles and social standing. As put forward by Pino and Mazza (2016), students were seen to "mentalize" more easily, especially during post-reading discussions: as the topic was the most comfortable to talk about, students more easily empathized with what the characters in Story 1; hence, as explained by Lazar (2003), the students showed more apt to consider their own cultural tendencies in relation to those of the narrative.

At 14.02%, Story 2—*Boys and Girls,* with its theme of gender roles—showed development scores similar to Story 3, and thus a steep drop from Story 1. Nevertheless, some of the students appeared to have interpreted the task of comparing to finding similarities only, rather than including contrasts as well. In post-reading discussions, for example, students spoke of gender roles as being incomparable to modern Thailand, attributing them to the agrarian societies of the past. These contrasts were not offered as examples on the posttests, however. Thus, comparisons still took place, just not ones with positive

relationships. Nevertheless, as suggested in Bal and Veltkamp (2013), the fictional narrative still allowed for a cultural connection, but apparently not one comparable to modern society in terms of similarity.

Story 3—*The Dollhouse*—with its theme of social standing, proved the least effective in developing ICC, with an increase at 12.39%. This proved especially true with regard to the comparing and relating aspect, with a rise of just under 3%. Post-reading discussion evidenced one cause of this, as the bullying and ridiculing of the story's impoverished characters made many of the students feel disconnected from the narrative, inasmuch as they did not feel such behavior was acceptable in Thai society. Furthermore, with the focus on the bullied characters, the students in many cases appear to have overlooked the distaste the author showed in tone for the bullying. Thus, this observation parallels what Singh et al. (2017) posit with regard to developing ICC: as the text allows for construction of sociocultural images—in this case the bullying of poor people—it may prove crucial to foster open-mindedness to an overarching moral implied by an author rather than to the specific events in a story.

Aspect 1, the Identifying dimension saw the most development, likely because it is the most straightforward to comprehend. Once students knew the main theme of each story, they could focus on it while reading, as well as during any post-reading discussions. This was especially the case for Story 1, which was set during Christmas, a holiday most of the students reported partaking in and enjoying. In other words, Christmas and gift giving were most successful in terms of comprehensible input (Wajnryb, 2003). This suggests that given their success in identifying its themes, Story 1 was the most understandable and therefore also showed the most interesting to the students (Yang, 2009).

For Aspect 2, Comparing and Relating, students were asked on the posttests if the stories they read could have been set in Thailand. For stories 1 and 3, students overwhelmingly reported that they could not have, while the gender roles featured in Story 2 could have been set in an antiquated Thailand. As a result of answering in the negative, many of the students failed to provide examples explaining why not, which greatly impacted scores. Nonetheless, as suggested by Singh et al (2017), through the texts, students were able to self-reflect during discussions in order to compare their culture with others. For example, in Story 2, students reported that unlike in the story, girls are no longer expected to stay home to help around the house; thus, even though the comparisons were not in the affirmative, students were able to relate the texts to their own lives, in order to develop a keener sense of culture.

While Aspect 3, Attitude, saw the lowest ICC development, pretest scores were the highest for this dimension. Thus, it may be inferred that the students already enjoyed empathy with, and an openness to learning more about, NES cultures. Indeed, as international school students, some of the interviewees reported feeling more used to western mores than to Thai ones. This finding suggests how effective ICC is developed in environments providing interaction with people from diverse cultures, as well as through authentic materials (Gomez, 2012).

In analyzing individual performance, only one—Student 8—saw a drop in ICC, at 9%. This is curious as Student 8's pretest scores were among the top half of the class. The other four students comprising the top half saw a mean increase of 23.36% in ICC development. Thus, for Student 8, the drop in scores likely points to a loss in motivation over time, rather than a growing deficit in aptitude. One other explanation for this may be preference, or lack thereof, for the stories chosen. This in turn would speak to the imperative nature of text selection (Isikli & Tarakcioglu, 2017): as all three stories were set in the early to mid-20th century, perhaps Student 8 would have preferred more modern stories. Furthermore, the same might be said of Student 5, who showed no increase in ICC overall. Specifically, an increase in ICC was observed for story one, while story 2 saw no change, and

story 3 saw a decrease. Thus, it appears as if student 5 either did not engage well with the stories themselves, or perhaps the repetitive structure of the lesson design, which was required to conduct the research.

Conclusions

This research helped link Byram's theory of ICC with utilizing NES literature in EFL classrooms. For teachers, this study shows how increasing their own knowledge of Byram's ICC theory can provide a framework to design intuitive lesson structures. For example, even in stories where culture exists passively, where it was not meant to play a focal point by the author, pre- and post-reading lessons may nonetheless be designed to direct attention to cultural themes. Like this, through discussion and writing exercises, students may develop ICC, even when the story itself is not predicated on imparting a cultural lesson.

More concretely, the study's results can aid Thailand's teachers in planning and designing lessons that enable their students to meet the standards of the MOE's Language and Culture Strand. Thai EFL students should be taught that literature, and short stories in particular, are a means to bridge cultural gaps existing in their knowledge of the English language. Consequently, and especially for students whose families lack the time and/or means to travel, literature can be taught as a vicarious experience into NES cultures and the daily lives of its peoples.

With regard to the needs of students at international schools, this study provided useful information concerning which ICC dimensions need not be focused on. For example, less time may be spent instructing students to gauge their attitude and openness to NES cultures, as many may have already developed this aspect of ICC through their day-to-day studies. By extension, this finding further demonstrates the validity and usefulness of Byram's model: by breaking down culture into different aspects, EFL teachers can better focus their classes toward those skills most needed by their students.

Recommendation for Future Research

The framework of this study offers numerous possibilities for future research. First, it would be beneficial to perform the same study with a larger sample group, as it would lend more insight into any results derived. This may be accomplished by including more students from different classes, or even by banding students by preexisting English ability to show how stories may develop language ability in tandem with ICC. Furthermore, as this study utilized just three of Byram's five dimensions, future research may include another combination of, or even all five aspects, of ICC. On the other hand, it would also be worthwhile to study one dimension at a time, especially with younger learners, in order to prevent misunderstandings like those which occurred on the pretests regarding the comparing and relating aspect.

Lastly, as this study's participants were in middle school, future analyses might focus instead on primary or upper secondary students. Like this, the extent to which literature can foster ICC development among both younger and older EFL students can be studied as well. For example, a study may consider if there is a minimum age necessary before students are able to understand the cultural aspects of literature; or, if older students need less time on certain dimension, given, perhaps, their greater wealth of experience.

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