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Teaching English Literature in Thai Universities: A Case Study at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

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Introduction

A number of studies, including Fowles (1996), Cheanvichai (2002), and Kongprasert (2007), reveal that Thai students do not belong to a reading culture and Thais are not book lovers. In a country where the majority of population is far from keen on reading, teaching and studying literature is one of the greatest challenges faced by both teachers and students. For teachers of literature, whether in Thai or English, they have a hard time pushing their students to read and appreciate the beauty of literary language particularly if the students are not studying in the language or arts fields. Students, on the other hand, believe the field of literature belongs to inferior students who are not able to do Mathematics or Physics, the subjects which are perceived to be more difficult and therefore more worthy of their trouble. As a result, it is not surprising to learn that teaching English literature poses a great difficulty and a thorny question as to how and why literature should be promoted in Thai tertiary education systems.

However, despite the above claim, there is no doubt about the roles and the significance of the English language in our education system. Thailand, as a developing country, requires that Thai citizens study English from an early age and continue to do so until they receive a higher education in universities so that they can compete in a competitive world market where English is a tool to get ahead.

Teaching English literature in Thai universities: A current overview

Unfortunately, this continuous support for the teaching of English in Thailand has hardly included the teachings of English literature. English and English literature have always been treated as two separate fields. Most students who do not read English or English literature as their main concentration find English prose, poetry and drama irrelevant to their academic world. Even some English major students believe that the four skills in the English language are more than enough for their future career and success. Driven by the wheels of globalisation, most Thai students prefer communicative skills in English to the ability to recall Shakespeare's lines. This inevitably results in English literature being mainly offered to arts students in public universities. Non-arts students, however, do not enjoy the same opportunity to explore the world of literature. Students' increasing demand of communicative English can be seen more clearly in Thai private universities. In recent years, some private universities discontinued offering a degree in English literature and opted for more instrumental programmes of study such as English for Translation, Business English and English for International Communication.

Furthermore, the teaching of English literature has been made more problematic by the fact that there are not many teachers in the field. The Ministry of Education has annually announced lists of subjects that are short of teachers. English literature makes it in the list every year. The lack of literature teachers means that students who do not major in English or English literature have far fewer chances to be exposed to the subject. Fundamental English courses in Thai universities mainly focus on the four skills and grammatical points necessary for everyday communication with no room for literature discussion or interpretation. This in turn gives way to the rise of English for Specific Purposes and simultaneously pushes English literature to a more peripheral position in Thailand's tertiary education.

From this current situation, we began to conduct an ongoing study to see how the teaching of English literature can benefit non-major students and to see if there are any implications for English literature teaching for other Thai universities that may have neglected the field on account of irrelevancy to their students.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), a technology university consisting of the faculties of Engineering, Science, Industrial Education and Information Technology. The teaching of English at KMUTT forms only a small part of those students' curriculum, making up nine compulsory credits. In order to graduate, students are required to take three English compulsory courses which focus on four communicative skills.

Introduction of teaching English literature at KMUTT

The idea of employing literature in the classroom stemmed from the writers' desire to see science students read texts that are unfamiliar to them in order to stimulate their critical thinking skills. Technology-related passages normally taught in our English courses are straightforward, consisting of sets of fixed expressions and ideas that do not require further elaborate thinking skills above the comprehension level. They can be rigid in terms of content and language which can prevent students from further developing their reading abilities and polishing their interpretive as well as inferential skills.

A book club, therefore, was initiated in January 2011 as a pilot, unofficial study to see how English literature, to be exact, short stories, could help expose eleven participants, whose academic backgrounds and interests had nothing to do with the field, to the realm of literary language, cultivate critical thinking skills and promote reading enjoyment. The club discussed a number of short stories for six weeks and the participants, mainly mechanical and computer engineering students, were called in for an in-depth interview after having written a series of journals to reflect on the short stories they had read. The data from the journals and the interviews were analysed and categorised in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy. Results were satisfactory to the research team because at least four participants reflected with high thinking categories: analysis and evaluation (Bunsom et al., 2011). This shows that they had gone beyond the usual habit of reading for comprehension and stepped into critical reading, which required careful scrutiny and interpretation prior to making informed choices. The interviews also demonstrate that the participants enjoyed this new experience of reading literature because it allowed them to expand vocabulary, read refined, polished language and understand the culture of the English-speaking world better.

To continue the teaching of English literature in a more efficient manner, the department of Language Studies decided to offer a new course titled Reading Appreciation in the first semester of 2011 (June-October), available to all the undergraduate students. The course entailed a wider variety of texts, both literary and non-literary, classroom and online discussions, an oral presentation and a final piece of reflective journal in which students expressed what they had learnt from the course, how they felt towards each piece of reading texts and how their attitudes towards reading English texts had changed.

In conducting the Reading Appreciation class, the writers closely investigated the students' on-line discussion board and analysed their final reflective journal to answer the following research question:

- How does using English literature empower the learning of Thai engineering students?

Literature Review

Benefits of Literature in Language Classroom

A lot of scholars have extensively written about the benefits and reasons why literature should be used or included in English lessons. An early scholar, Frye (1964, 77) summarises the benefit of literature in "its encouragement of tolerance". Imagination, he claims, allows the possibility of anything and erases the concepts of rights and wrongs. Povyey (1967, 41) posits that "literature will increase all language skills because it will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex syntax". Widdowson (1979), McKay (1982) and McRae (1994) argue that despite the current focus in ESL on meeting the particular academic and occupational needs of the students, the study of literature can contribute to such goals through the increase in reading proficiency, the promotion of interaction between reader and writer mediated through the text and the nurturing of abilities to decode the language and understand the concepts presented. Larzar (1993) points out that literature can help expose students to complex themes and unexpected use of language. A good novel can involve students in the suspense of the plot which is more interesting than the narratives in course books. A play and a poem may induce a powerful

emotional response from students. If teachers carefully choose the materials, students will become involved and feel that literature is relevant to their lives. Moreover, literature according to Larzar (1993) enables students to understand the culture of people whose language they are using. Literature can encourage students to become aware of the social, political and historical events which form the background of literary texts written by authors living in many different countries. In addition, literature can encourage language acquisition by providing meaningful contexts for processing and interpreting the new language. Literature can be a way of supplementing the limited input of the classroom. As literature has various levels of meaning, students are required to share opinions and feelings in English. This can help accelerate their acquisition of language. (pp. 14-21).

Recent studies also confirm that literature is a subject of great advantages for EFL students of any field. Pison (2000) and Maley (2001) propose three benefits of using literature as a language teaching resource: linguistic, methodological and motivational. Linguistically, students are exposed to authentic language in various social and cultural contexts. The methodological benefit of literary texts permits various interpretations and therefore, encourages opportunities of interaction in the classroom. Finally, literature can motivate students to express their opinions, relate to the topics of discussion and identify with characters in the story.

Research Methodology

Subjects

The Reading Appreciation class consisted of 20 students from different Engineering departments: Computer, Mechanical and Production. They were a mixed crowd of second year, third year and fourth year students. Their English proficiency ranged from average to very good. Note that second year students had a stronger command of written and spoken English.

Course Requirements

The semester lasted 15 weeks and the course ran for 45 hours altogether. Students were required to attend at least 80% of the classes. We assessed them from attendance & participation (10%), small presentations throughout the semester (20%), a mid-term examination (20%), online discussions on a Facebook community page (20%), a final oral presentation (20%) and a reflective journal submitted by the end of the semester (10%).

Course Materials

The course materials came from a variety of sources carefully chosen by the writers. Upon selection of the materials, we took three things into consideration. First of all, the genre of texts was our first priority. As the course was introduced as a result of the book club, the texts deployed in the course had to be more extensive. In the first five weeks, we used newspaper articles, magazine articles, brochures, advertisements and speeches to familiarise the students to different linguistic features found in those texts. After that, in week 6, we introduced literary devices such as figurative language, imagery and tones before assigning them to read literary texts in their original forms, including an autobiography, two short stories, a number of poems and a novella.

Secondly, we focused on the variety of subject matters and themes in the chosen texts. To broaden the students' horizons and to truly empower students with the cultural knowledge of the world, we selected texts that were broad in content, ranging from something familiar (family affairs, love, death, nature and childhood) to unfamiliar (class struggle in the UK and US as well as discrimination against African Americans).

Finally, the level of difficulty of the text was taken into account. Some texts were more difficult than others in terms of length, vocabulary and stylistics. We decided to keep the difficult texts because we believed that it would pose a great challenge for students to overcome and it could be a good method of inviting them to the world of research.

Here are some of the texts used in the class:

1. Ring Lardner's "The Golden Honeymoon" (1922): a story dealing with an old couple embarking on a honeymoon to celebrate their golden marriage and simultaneously reevaluating their bonds and love for each other.
2. Grace Stone Coats's "Wild Plums" (1929): a story about a family who forbids their daughter to go on a trip to collect wild plums.
3. John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937): a novella that portrays two ranchmen travelling together during the Great Depression in America in the 1930s.
4. Adeline Yen Mah's "Chinese Cinderella" (1999): an autobiography of a woman who recalls her maltreated childhood in China and Hong Kong and her conflicts with her stepmother.
5. Rattawut Lapcharoensap's "Priscilla the Cambodian" (2004): a story of a Cambodian refugee girl who befriends two Thai boys in the midst of racial bias.

For more details regarding the course description and lesson details, see Appendix 1.

Results and Discussion

To answer the research question "How does using English literature empower Thai engineering students?", students' written journals were analysed in great detail. Through the Reading Appreciation course, the students were successfully empowered to master and achieve in the eight domains: critical thinking, appreciation in reading and intrinsic motivation in learning English, knowledge of the world, awareness of language beauty and its usage, knowledge transfer, reading fluency, sharing and giving opinion skills and understanding people and life. Note that the pieces of journal used here are kept in their original form.

1. Promoting critical thinking skills

From the journals, many of them self-reported that this course encouraged them to critically analyse the story, allowed them the ability to think more deeply and equipped them with interpretive skills. According to reader response theory, reading involves the process of active meaning construction. Literature as critical texts cannot be read passively. Readers will respond differently to the same texts, noticing and valuing or devaluing different features (Hall, 2005). The following excerpts can help illustrate this point:

Subject 4:

This class gives me a chance to think deeper than it should to improve my critical thinking skill and starting analysis and synthesis the work. I start to possess the character in the story and try to understand everyone in that situation. It is a bit hard because I have to use all of my 20 years of experiences to analyse the 40 50 or 60 years old character. However, this course guides me to think bravely and reasonably.

This subject explicitly linked literature class to the attainment of critical thinking skills. Through this class he/she learned to employ his/her background knowledge to analyse the characters. This student also believed this course allowed him/her a good opportunity to think beyond the surface meaning in a reasonable way.

Subject 5:

What I had learned in English Appreciation is how to interpret something. The biggest idea that I had learned is that every pictures, every stories, every poems always have a deeper meaning than what we see or read. Sometimes, I interpret things too much it's also making me go crazy. I think interpretation can be addicted because defining something inside your own head is freedom of thinking and it also reflects how you think.

Subject 5 was equipped with an interpretive skill through literature class in which he/she was encouraged to look for the deeper meaning of certain literary texts with multiple levels of meaning.

Subject 8:

However, the way to interpret and analyze are from the experience or the background knowledge of each person which means to have to continually train a critical thinking skill by trying to analyze information from many different sources which it is cannot be assured whether they are right or not. This course makes me brave to see many opinions or identify myself in order to choose what can believe and what is not true. It will be useful for me to live in the society as an intellectual man who can understand the story in different perspective.

Similarly, this student specifically cited a critical thinking skill as a benefit from this course, postulating that this skill was derived from his/her attempt to analyse information from different sources. Moreover, he/she also pointed out the ability to evaluate things. Evaluation which refers to the ability to assess the credibility and the logical strength of statements, descriptions or questions is also one of the keys of critical thinking (Facione, 1990).

Subject 19:

I learn to interpret and understand the texts better. I learn to find and make use of things hidden in the texts such as historical facts, the poet's background or interest, the reflection of people behaviors, the social conditions in that particular era, etc. which I need to read thoroughly in order to obtain them. Yet the more important thing is my realization of the importance of reading. It can introduce me to the world I've never been before. It is more than to give people enjoyment or relaxation but to raise awareness of people to think and improve themselves..... Apart from improving my reading skills, it teaches me to read in a wider perspective, to think further, and not to limit my imagination. It would be a big mistake and major regret if I never took this course. Thanks to Reading Appreciation for making me truly appreciate reading.

Through studying literature, this subject was able to give opinions and support them with evidence. This matches the definition of critical thinking as reflective thinking involving the evaluation of evidence relevant to a claim so that a sound conclusion can be drawn from the evidence according (Bensley, 1998). With this skill, this student also learned to comprehend the ambiguity of texts better.

2. Increasing appreciation in reading and intrinsic motivation in learning English

Mostly students do not enjoy reading literature for various reasons. Its non-standard language features may be unfamiliar. Students with a low level of language proficiency may have difficulty with vocabulary and are unable to comprehend even the literal meaning. The playfulness or creativity of literary texts may also be missed. Reader background in terms of culture and experience can be an issue too. Finally, many language students do not recognise the value of literature (Hall, 2005). However, through the literature course, students are empowered to appreciate reading and are instilled with an intrinsic motivation to learn English. From the journals, this course can successfully change the students' attitudes towards reading. They obviously developed a passion and love for reading. They also expressed an intrinsic motivation to learn English as a result of studying in the literature course.

Subject 3:

I want to say to you that I do fall in love with English further than I was in high school. I thought there are only three parts of English such as grammar, reading and conversation. It doesn't though. English is the language that we use to communicating, inscribing, working and seeking out the world. Even though, I don't study English much as the other, I believe this language is extremely essential in our daily life.....While I was studying this English course, I always paid attention in study and I love to learn language. I think we have to be good at English since our country is ready to be part of ASEAN.

After studying literature, this student learned that English was essential in his/her life and openly expressed a love for English.

Subject 14:

I find this class is very interesting. Reading Appreciation class is not teach me only how writer writes their passages but I like *Aj* when *Aj* include background of passage to make student understand what writer situation. Some people are black people, some people are feminism and why they write.

This student cited the teacher as an element contributing to his/her favorable inclination towards reading literature. Here, the teacher helped students with background knowledge underlying certain literary passages. This reveals that despite a lack of cultural background literature can be made appealing through certain instructional practices.

Subject 16:

Reading appreciation makes me appreciate some kinds of books that I used to hate. This class made me realize my weakness, pushed my through obstacles. I feel more confident to read and explain after took this course. It feels like pain when I can't understand a thing that I supposed to be able to understand. To eliminate this feeling, the easiest solution is to study more and more. This course is an important jigsaw that fulfills my hunger for knowledge.

A radical attitude shift can be seen from this journal. Through the literature class, the student dramatically changed his/her feelings towards reading literary texts from “hate” to “love”.

Subject 19:

However, during I was taking this course, my attitude towards reading changed. I became more interested in all kinds of books. I realized that my world was so narrow and I chose to be stuck in that narrow world by refusing to read different things just because I thought it was too hard to understand - yet I didn't even try to understand it...

I will want to read more or know more about the texts I just read. For example, after reading the Chinese Cinderella, I wanted to read the full version and the related story Falling Leaves. Similarly, after reading Of Mice and Men, I was interested to read more of John Steinbeck's books that I went to search for a list of his works. Or after I learned "the Applicant", I went to find other poems of Sylvia Plath or her poet friends with similar styles: Anne Sexton, Emily Dickinson, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Also, I wrote down all the recommended books and movies that my teacher suggested in the class which I aimed to read/watch in my free time.

Similarly, this student pointed out the change in his/her attitude towards reading due to the experience in this course. Intrinsic motivation was also developed. This student became more interested in all kinds of books, expressing true interest in reading other pieces of literary work. When the teacher recommended good books, he/she expressed a real enthusiasm to read them in his/her free time. Notably, a teacher is also an important factor fostering students' love for reading as Gambrell (1996) maintains that to foster reading motivation a teacher must be an explicit reading model. From the journal, the teacher as a model expressed his/her passion for reading, encouraging students to read beyond the compulsory book list.

3. Broadening knowledge of the world

Most students in Reading Appreciation had no background in literature and knowledge of the world. However, the journal analysis shows that literature can help them effectively learn about other cultures, histories and certain types of general knowledge held as not related to their own field of study, engineering, as Peterson and Coltrane (2003) posit that literary texts are often replete with cultural information and evoke memorable reactions for readers. Texts that are carefully selected for a given group of students and with specific goals in mind can be very helpful in allowing students to acquire insight into a culture. To understand this point better, the analysis of the students' journals is needed.

Subject 4:

It's growing my determination, ideas and common background knowledge of history of civilization all over the world. you give me vision to see the world in another perspective and bring me to the world of delightful poem and repertoire. But not only for analyze, it will give us an idea to think the way world think and some of the history and the basis of the people all around the world which can reflex from the history of that nation. We know that there is color discrimination in America and when the Barack Obama had his speech, he surely speak out color discrimination because there is the history inside lot of color discrimination in South Africa. We are afraid of 9-11 because we know that it is the first time that America is the loser in her own soil. This is the event that this course if me the urge to know a lot of the world

history better than the result of the football matches last night. Furthermore, History isn't that boring. It's fun to know more and more (even more fun if there is someone to tell a story). I will read some more history for reading for my appreciation.

According to Subject 4, studying literature can provide him/her with the knowledge of history from different parts of the world. To an engineering student whose interest lied in football matches, the concepts of history and cultures seemed far-fetched. This course, however, enables him/her to become aware of the knowledge of the world, increasing the student's desire to explore the topics beyond his/her academic fields and personal interest. Moreover, the student asserted that history learned through literature was not boring, inspiring him/her to read more.

Subject: 11

I never know before that Shakespeare is a man. I thought he is a woman because he loves writing poems.

Generally, despite a lack of literature knowledge people know Shakespeare. However, through this course the student learned to know the key figure in British literature.

4. Increasing awareness of language beauty and its usage

Literature class also promotes the students' awareness of language beauty and its usage. Although many critics argue that creativity and beauty also exist in everyday language, not only in the literary text, and language in literature tends to be more "ordinary", some literary texts' language are still considered elevated, figurative, and sophisticated. Especially, students in Reading Appreciation who had little exposure to refined language found literary language very difficult. However, after attending the literature class students learned to appreciate the language beauty and became aware of the extensive potential of language usage.

Subject 11:

Further, I have learned many popular poems such as Annabel Lee, Daffodils and The Applicant. I just know what powerful language is. Even though I cannot understand real meaning by myself, I am glad to hear it from you. It is very interesting.

Subject 11 was impressed by what he/she referred to as the "powerful language". For this student, although he/she could not really comprehend the meaning of the poem read aloud by the teacher, the sounds, rhymes and rhyming alone could emotionally move him/her. The powerful language here can be seen as the beauty of language, impressively affecting this particular student.

Subject 12:

In Priscilla the Cambodian, this story is also referred to social class' For example, the word "rat" is a concept of victims (scapegoats) that it's dirty, disgusting, disease carrier- The word "gold teeth" refers to uncertainty of life, comes and goes, tarnished childhood. And the word "bicycle" refers to cycle of life and freedom. From learning the short stories that they make me know the wider meaning of each word which used in the stories. From now on, I will think each word has more than one meaning when I read the stories.

Differently from Subject 11 who was overwhelmed by the beauty of poetic language although it was incomprehensible in the first place, Subject 12 was impressed by the multiple levels of meaning of a particular word. Through reading literature, this student learned the literal and figurative aspects of language. One word can mean many things, depending on the contextualizing situation.

Subject 16:

The part that I love the most was in the middle of the course, which is about literacy devices. The reason that I thought it's important is that I usually find it in the movies, series, or books. For example, in a series Friends, Monica said "Is that irony?" This single phrase made me realize that the concept of literacy devices is commonly in a daily life.

Similar to Subject 15, this student learned the literary jargon from this course. Furthermore, his/her understanding of a particular term "irony" is applicable to comprehending other realms of entertainment such as movies and series.

5. Promoting knowledge transfer

Literature class also empowers students to achieve knowledge transfer in reading. They can successfully apply the knowledge learned through literature class in other similar contexts. Two students can help clarify this point:

Subject 4:

I have an urge to reading more and more books and novels in English because of this course. I try to print to classic novels and start to read many of them. I try to use everything from this course to interpret the Japanese novels and Thai light novels too which I think there are lack of things to imply in nowadays works. It's usually written for entertainment and for the readers purposed and there are nothing as a major problem and complex as same as the old novels even though the world is more filthy and dirty with many bad people in society. After all, Japanese novels is for sexual purposes and I don't think it is good for improving my critical reading but I can interpret that Japanese world is full of unclean contents. I think of many epic Thai books such as "*Pra Apai Manee*" which it is also insert the sexual contents but it is sometimes hard to understand because there are a lot of old words which give the same problem as old English which I've never seen and used before. Thus I have to try it only in English and other languages which can improve my language skill incredibly.

In particular, this subject stated that he had attempted to make use of all the knowledge and strategies he/she learned from English literature class in order to interpret Japanese or Thai novels. This student also identified the shared problem he/she faced when reading either Thai or English literary texts. It is difficult to interpret the story if it contains old-fashioned vocabulary that he/she does not know the meaning. Finally, Subject 4 came up with the conclusion that he/she had to try to read more to improve his/her language skills.

Subject 11:

Literary devices are wonderful. I had thought about literary devices were only in Thai poem

Similar to Subject 4, Subject 11 recognised the shared literary devices in Thai and English poems after attending literature class. This student found literary devices “wonderful” because they are applicable both in Thai and English poems. This can be considered knowledge transfer.

6. Developing reading fluency

For another realm of empowerment through the use of literature, students can effectively develop reading fluency. Reading fluency has been defined as smooth effortless reading and precise and speedy reading (Oakly, 2005; Rasinski, 1989; Welsch; 2006). For most readers, fluency develops gradually over time and through extensive reading practice (Biemiller, 1977-1978). Literature as one part of extensive reading undoubtedly helps foster reading fluency too. After given more and more literary texts to read, students in this study successfully developed reading fluency. When they could recognise words and comprehend the story, they began to read faster. The following three excerpts from three students will help us recognise the idea of empowering students to promote reading fluency:

Subject 7:

...Chinese Cinderella or Pricilla the Cambodian I feel it is very hard to get them all I tried and tried to understand and analyzed all of things together. After that I feel a changing of my reading skill when I read ‘Of Mice and Men’ I read this story easier, faster and flow along the text.

Subject 7’s journal can reflect the experience from the rudimentary level of reading on which a reader must struggle with reading the short literary text at the very beginning of the course to the higher level on which this student at the very end of the course can even read the longer text more easily. This can reveal fluency increases with time and the larger amount of extensive reading.

Subject 12:

Furthermore, I can read the text faster than before. From now on, if I find the long articles, I will not panic and I will use these strategies to read those articles.

Similarly, the higher speed of reading was emphasised as a result of reading literature. This subject also pointed out that the strategies learned through the course enabled him/her to read long articles faster.

Subject 15:

My reading skill is improved because language in short stories, novels, and poems is difficult to read. So, after I have read many of them, I can normal text more quickly.

In the same way, the higher speed was identified as a result of reading a lot of literary texts with difficult language.

7. Enhancing sharing and giving opinion skills

In the Reading Appreciation course, students were encouraged to share and give opinions through three main ways. Firstly, they had to participate in active discussion in class, commenting on a certain literary text. Secondly, they were required to formally present the project interpreting a certain literary text. Finally, they were also offered a chance to freely

give opinions on literary texts on the Facebook page designed for this particular course. Subject 7 can help us see how literature class helps enhance sharing and giving opinion skills:

Subject 7:

In this course, we have a discussion for every text we have read which is a part that I really like because there is a place to share your idea from yours mind everyone will come out and say 'I think that..., in my opinion, ' this is where the knowledge after reading are precipitate together when someone show their attitude then somehow another one will come with a question or an argument. This is make the reading is more valuable.

Specifically, the student was impressed by the fact that literature class allowed him/her an opportunity to share ideas and have active discussion on a literary text. Through this way, reading was considered “more valuable”.

8. Understanding people and life

For the last benefit of literature, students understand people and life. In other words, students learn about various aspects of their own lives and develop their understanding towards others as can be seen from the following three excerpts:

Subject 11:

This fiction can encourage me, after I read it I felt my life is very precious. I'm lucky I'm in super family - I have many chances in my life, study in good school and good university. I will do my best for everything.

From fiction, this student learned about various aspects of his/her own life. In particular, he/she learned to value what he/she already had and used to take for granted.

Subject 14:

Learn Reading Appreciation class makes me change mind set about people from judge to understand....

Through studying literature, Subject 14 learned to change his/her attitude towards other people. He/she stopped judging those people and tried to understand them, looking for reasons underlying the actions instead.

Subject 15:

My point of view has become wider. I found variety of aspect through the characters. For example, in the same incident thought of each character is different up to the experience of that character. I can see the view that I had never thought before because I'm never in the same state of the character.

Similar to Subject 14, after reading literature, this student's perspective was broadened. He/she learned to look at various aspects through the character's point of view. In this way, this student can learn to understand the character better.

Challenges and Recommendations

There are a few challenges that we or any other teachers adopting literary texts have encountered. The first challenge was students' feelings of discouragement caused by the level of difficulty of the chosen texts. Most of the Engineering students at KMUTT have no prior background to extensive reading, nor do they have existing knowledge of the historical, social or cultural aspects of the countries to which literary texts belong. In the book club, for example, an excerpt from Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* which features the European colonisation of Congo puzzled the participants and we had to explain certain historical backgrounds for them. We recommend that teachers select the texts that are not too culturally distant to students. For Reading Appreciation, we included an autobiography of a Chinese girl because Chinese culture is somehow related. The short story "Priscilla the Cambodian" by Rattawut Lapcharoensap is another good example because students understand the settings of the story and therefore, read it better.

Another challenge lies in students' change of heart. Feeling discouraged by the length, the content and the difficulty of texts or by their study loads, students tend to give up the reading class easily. A recommendation for this problem is that teachers need to set an example of a good, appreciative reader who manages time wisely. They have to help students build a habit of reading and give them the support they may need.

Conclusion

Above everything else, teaching English literature to Engineering students, either in the book club or in the classroom for the past year, has been quite a journey and an adventure for us. One thing we learnt and would like others to know is that Engineering or other Science students are not to be underestimated. For so long, Thai universities, especially universities of science and technology have been reluctant to employ literary texts because teachers have assumed that they are not the "right" type of text for the students. We hope that this paper can clarify such dubious assumptions, set a strong example for other universities to venture outside their comfort zone and exploit literature in their teachings of English.

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Appendix 1

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Department of Language Studies

Teaching Programme

Course Title LNG 231: Reading Appreciation

Prerequisite -

Course Description: Reading principles and techniques. Reading for comprehension and main idea. Critical reading. Various genres of texts and medias: documentaries, autobiographies, speeches, short stories, poems and novels. Emphasis on development of reading appreciation and critical thinking skills.

Lesson plans

Week No.	Synopsis of Lectures Planned
1. Reading for Comprehension	Give an introduction to a higher level of reading. Get to know each other. Discuss expectations and results of the course. Revise reading strategies: skimming, scanning and reading for details. Practise skimming and scanning for main ideas with three different passages. Discuss problems that occur when speed reading is required.
2. Reading the Familiar	Read familiar types of written texts: newspapers, brochures and magazines. Discuss the elements of each reading text. Check comprehension after reading through discussion and written exercises. In group, work on a chosen piece and present in front of the class.
3. Critical Reading I	Expose students to different linguistic and literary devices used in written pieces. Define what critical reading means and discuss the usefulness of critical reading. Explore the tones and purposes in writings. In group, practice three different passages, using critical reading techniques. Discuss possible meanings from interpretations and do an oral presentation.
4. Critical Reading II	Practise critical reading from various sources: pictures, cartoons, movie reviews and songs. Differentiate facts from opinions.

	<p>Detect biases and hidden meanings in passages. Complete written exercises and conduct group discussions.</p>
5. Critical Reading III	<p>Read and discuss two passages of extended lengths. Apply all the critical reading elements into use. Do an oral presentation in group.</p>
6. Reading Speeches	<p>Read a variety of speeches conducted by world leaders such as Nelson Mandela, George Bush, Tony Blair and Martin Luther King. Detect choices of words, expressions, discourse and prosodic styles in speeches.</p>
7-8. Reading Autobiography	<p>Investigate the socio-cultural and historical backgrounds of each speech to better students' understandings. In group, do an oral presentation on the effectiveness of speeches.</p>
9. Reading Short Stories I	<p>Explore the elements of short stories such as characters, plots, themes, symbols and ending as well as revise literary devices. Read Grace Stone Coates' <i>Wild Plums</i> and discuss the use of metaphors and symbols as well as their significance in terms of interpretation and understanding the text. Analyze characters in writing and give specific examples to support the argument.</p>
10 Reading Short Stories II	<p>Explore the elements of short stories such as characters, plots, themes, symbols and ending as well as revise literary devices. Read Rattawut Lapcharoensap's <i>Priscilla the Cambodian</i> and discuss the use of metaphors and symbols as well as their significance in terms of interpretation and understanding the text. Analyze characters in writing and give specific examples to support the argument.</p>
11. Reading Short Stories III	<p>Explore the elements of short stories such as characters, plots, themes, symbols and ending as well as revise literary devices. Read Ring Lardner's <i>The Golden Honeymoon</i> and discuss the use of metaphors and symbols as well as their significance in terms of interpretation and understanding the text. Analyze characters in writing and give specific examples to support the argument.</p>
12. Reading Poetry	<p>Explore the elements and types of poetry. Investigate poetry of various themes: nature, death, war and love. Discuss in group and share the opinion in terms of poetic language and literary devices. Interpret the meanings and messages of poetry. Understand poetic connotations and denotations.</p>
13-14. Reading Novels	<p>Explore the elements of novels such as characters, plots, themes, symbols and ending as well as revise literary devices. Read John Steinbeck's <i>Of Mice and Men</i> and discuss the use of metaphors and symbols as well as their significance in terms of interpretation and understanding the text. Analyze characters in writing and give specific examples to support the argument.</p>

15. Students' Oral Presentation	Do an oral presentation in group on assigned topics. Give feedbacks and comments. Share and explore more possibilities of interpretation and comprehension.
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Materials: Course packet compiled by Lecturers

Adeline Yen Mah's *Chinese Cinderella*

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

Assessment: (100%)

- Attendance and participation 10%
- Presentations 20%
- Final Presentation 20%
- Term project 20 %
(= on-line discussion in www.facebook.com/reading appreciation)
- Midterm examination 20%
- Reflective journal 10%

85%-above.....	A	80% - 84%.....	B+
75% - 79%.....	B	70% - 74%.....	C+
65% - 69%.....	C	60% - 64%.....	D+
50% - 59%.....	D	49%-below.....	F

Note:

1. Students are not allowed to miss more than 20% of class time.
2. absence = -0.5 point / 1 late attendance = -0.25 point (coming after 15 minutes = late; 2 late attendance = 1 absence)