"How Do You Build a Literature Course?": An Online Resource for Literature Curriculum Development

Panida MONYANONT* & Teeranuch ANURIT
School of Liberal Arts, Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand
*panida.mon@mfu.ac.th

Abstract: This study aims to create an online resource to assist the process of text selection in literature curriculum development. The online database is to provide information on the literature courses offered in the world's ranked universities according to the THE and QS ranking systems. Basing the study on Kachru's three concentric circles of English – inner, outer and expanding – the researchers compiled the course information for seven hundred sixty-two literature courses in twenty-four universities of varying English language backgrounds. The online resource was developed to systematically arrange the compiled literary curricula information in terms of course title, course description, and reading lists. This online resource, https://www.literature-resource.com/, could prove useful for literature curriculum development in the process of text selection. Moreover, users can use this resource to explore the literary trends in various institutions around the world.

Keywords: Literature course, online resource, literature curriculum development

1. Introduction

The Thailand Qualification Framework (TQF1) of the Bachelor of Arts (English) was announced in 2017 (B.E.2560) as an instructional guideline for curriculum or program development. Its goal is to ensure the standard of programs in different institutions across the country and the quality of their graduates. In the TQF1, there are four English disciplines required for the undergraduate students, namely English communicative skills, linguistics, literature and translation. The focus of this study is in the field of literature, as it is the researchers' primary teaching focus.

According to the Thailand Qualification Framework for the Bachelor of Arts (English) (2017, p.1), the broad framework for literature instruction is "to have learners read, analyze the structure, and interpret English literature. The TQF1 states that [learners] shall have knowledge of important trends, processes and issues in English literature". This achieves one of the expected learning outcomes of the academic domain: learners should "be able to read, interpret, analyze and review British, American and other English or English-translated literature in prose, poetry and drama. Their analyses shall be based on relevant literary theories which comprehend the importance of an individual, society and culture, leading to a peaceful coexistence" (Thailand Qualification Framework of the Bachelor of Arts (English), 2017, p.3). In addition, the TQF1 directs that every English program have a minimum of twelve credits of literature courses. Thus, educators in Thailand's English programs have to meticulously design literature curricula which comply with the TQF1 of the Bachelor of Arts (English).

Unfortunately, there are no clear guidelines or procedures for curricular development of literature courses in terms of text selection; while in the realm of literature education, reading materials are not limited only to the English literary canon, but also those literary texts written and translated into English. As a result, we were lost while developing the new curriculum, assigned to develop four new literature courses to meet the TQF1's strict credit requirements. It should be noted that prior to the TQF1, there were no requirements on the number of literature credits offered by an English Program. Lacking experience in

curriculum development, the researchers were unsure which materials would be most appropriate in the construction of each course, and what the current trends in the world of literature education were.

To make up for our relative lack of experience concerning curriculum development, the researchers reviewed the most commonly cited texts in the field, ultimately discovering one key element for an effective curriculum: the selection of course materials is the process around which an effective curriculum will be shaped and enacted (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). Fortunately, there are clear criteria for text selection, especially for literature courses, proposed by Lazar (1993), Arias (2007) and Bulusan (2019).

For an overall picture of content selection, Ornstein and Hunkins (2017) described the seven criteria for curricula in general: 1) The first criterion is self-sufficiency. The content should enable learners to discover their potential and assist learners to understand one's self and live with others tranquilly in society. 2) Significance is a criterion focusing on the importance and applicability of the content. 3) The third aspect is validity. Throughout the use of the curriculum, the selected content should be valid, verified, and adapted to the learner. 4) The balance between the interest of learners and community is the focus of criterion four. 5) Fifth, the utility of the selected contents should be universal regardless of space and time. 6) Learnability is the sixth criterion, this focuses on the difficulty level, organization, and sequence of the content. 7) Last, the feasibility criterion mandates the selection of practical content while considering economic and political limitation.

For literature curriculum development, Lazar (1993), proposed a three-item checklist for selecting materials. The three items are: 1) type of course, 2) criteria for selecting texts, and 3) other text-related factors. First, educators should evaluate the type of course they are building, this includes the skill level of students, students' reasons for learning English, the intensity of the course and the purpose of the course as a general English course, a major requirement, a major elective or an English-for-specific-purpose course. Second, two groups of text selection criteria were proposed to find the materials most relevant to students' characteristics. Group one's criteria focused on intellectual maturity, emotional understanding and interests or hobbies. Group two consisted of cultural background, linguistic proficiency, and literary background. Third, the other four text-related factors which should be in educators' consideration were: text availability, text length, exploitability, and the relevance of the selected texts in a syllabus.

Arias (2007) also proposed text selection criteria for literary curriculum development. She suggested that when selecting texts, the following criteria should be considered: 1) Learners' skills must match the texts' levels of difficulty. 2) Learners' interests must coincide with the subject matter of selected texts, as this could increase students' motivation to learn. 3) Learners' needs such as their ability to comprehend the texts and their ability to utilize the texts. 4) Learners' background knowledge and previous experiences must be considered in choosing the texts. 5) Learners' professional lives in the future should be relevant with the selected materials; and 6) The texts' authenticity is important to equip learners with real-life language use.

In addition, Bulusan (2019) conducted a systematic review and proposed the acronym CARE as potential criteria for selecting instructional material in teaching literature, namely: Cultural enrichment, Authenticity of the material, Relevant language enrichment, and Easy requirements for reading and understanding. This study was conducted from English-written research articles for literature instruction published from 2012-2017 in well-recognized databases. All of the samples discussed selection of materials for ESL literature classes.

Based on the four aforementioned studies which established the essential criteria for literary text selection, the researchers of this study re-categorized them into four main criteria: 1) Students 2) Texts 3) Courses and 4) Limitations. 1) The students' level and background, needs, and interests should be emphasized. 2) The texts' quality, difficulty, relevance and authenticity should be assessed. 3) The purpose and intensity of the course should be considered. 4) The limitations of resources, economic factors, and the political climate should be a variable in selecting texts. However, the research team found that there have not been any tools in the process of text selection for curriculum development. With this present challenge, this research is to initiate an online database to facilitate educators in selecting materials for their courses.

With the recognition that text selection is a crucial step in literary curriculum development and in order to create an online resource, the researchers realized that the purpose of learning English is also important and relevant to where learners are in Kachru's three concentric circles. In order to collect data

about literary text selection in higher education, this study explored reading materials in the literature curricula offered in the top ranked universities worldwide, based on two influential ranking organizations: the Times Higher Education World University Rankings' and the QS World University Rankings' annual publication of 2020 (Aziz, 2016). Only these two organizations provide rankings information in the fields of humanities and social science including literature related curricula. Kachru's concept of three concentric circles of English language (1985) was applied to select the universities from the two ranking systems which would present the most comprehensive view of the global direction of English literature education. Therefore, in each ranking system, the top five universities in the field of language and humanities were selected from each circle of Kachru's three concentric circles. The three circles are the Inner circle, the Outer circle, and the Expanding circle (Rajadurai, 2005).

1) The Inner circle consists of countries in which the English Language has played a traditional and original role. English is their first language, or the so-called mother tongue. Thus, people in the Inner circle are called L1 speakers of the language. English is their official, original, native language; consequently, the norms and standards of English are formed in this circle and spread to the other circles.

2) The Outer circle refers to countries where people speak an official, non-native variety of English, most likely due to their colonial background. English is their official language and their second language, so they are called L2 speakers. They use English in their day-to-day activities and interactions. Interestingly, the English speakers in the Outer circle are the ones questioning and developing the norms of English.

3) The Expanding circle is formed by speakers in countries where English is not the medium of their daily interaction. They learn English as a foreign language or a third or fourth language; they are known as EFL speakers. English has no historical development in this circle; in addition, the speakers follow the rules established by the Inner circle as well as those challenged or developed by the Outer circle.

Due to the immense volume of information regarding literary reading materials, the team decided to look to technology for support. We felt the answer was to create an electronic database which systematically arranged the content and materials of literature courses around the world. This resource could ensure that reading materials in specific areas of literature are well organized and easily accessed by educators as well as learners. Therefore, this study, which is part of a larger project granted by Mae Fah Luang University, aims to create an online resource which offers access to the information – course description and reading lists – of courses offered in the ranked universities worldwide. It should be noted that none of this information is proprietary to any of the institutions selected; all information was accessed via university websites open to the public.

2. Research Question

What could be a possible tool to assist in the text selection of literature courses?

3. Method

3.1 Tools

1) Based on Kachru's three concentric circles of English –Inner, Outer, and Expanding – the top five universities (according to the THE and the QS ranking results of 2020) in each circle were selected. Therefore, there would be 30 universities in total.
2) For the literature courses in all selected universities, the team compiled the course title, course description, and teaching materials of literature courses.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis
1) Using the THE and QS ranking results for 2020, the researchers investigated the course information for the selected universities in the field of language and humanities. The top ranked universities were selected

and categorized into three groups, or circles - Inner, Outer, and Expanding – in accordance with Kachru's three concentric circles of English. The location and background of the top ranked universities in the two ranking systems were assessed in order to select institutions which offered a glimpse into all three of Kachru's circles of English. This assured that the exploration of literature materials in this study cover a variety of international educational contexts. The top five universities in each circle were selected. However, because some universities were ranked in both the THE and QS, there were ultimately twenty-four universities involved in the study.

2) Information concerning the course titles, descriptions, and teaching materials of thirty-seven undergraduate programs was collected from the official website of its affiliate. Then the researchers assessed whether each curriculum should be categorized as a literature course.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the top five universities in the three concentric circles of the THE and QS.

Table 1 *The top five universities in three concentric circles from the THE and QS*

Circle	Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE)	QS World University Rankings (QS)
Inner	1. University of Oxford 2. California Institute of Technology 3. University of Cambridge 4. Stanford University 5. Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1. University of Oxford 2. University of Cambridge 3. Harvard University 4. University of California, Berkeley 5. Stanford University
Outer	1. National University of Singapore 2. The University of Hong Kong 3. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology 4. Chinese University of Hong Kong 5. City University of Hong Kong	1. The University of Hong Kong 2. National University of Singapore 3. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore 4. Universiti Malaya 5. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Expanding	1. Tsinghua University 2. Peking University 3. The University of Tokyo 4. Kyoto University 5. University of Science and Technology of China	1. Freie Universitaet Berlin 2. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin 3. University of Amsterdam 4. Peking University 5. Fudan University

The findings show that there were twenty-four universities, instead of thirty universities originally planned, as University of Oxford, University of Cambridge and Stanford University were ranked in the Inner circle of both the THE and QS. Therefore, there are only seven universities in this circle. For the Outer circle, National University of Singapore and The University of Hong Kong appear in both ranking systems, resulting in only eight universities. In the Expanding circle, there are nine universities because Peking University was ranked in both systems.

The collection of literature courses offered in those universities was vast and various. In these twenty-four universities, there were seven hundred sixty-two courses consisting of three hundred eighty-seven courses in the Inner- circle universities, two hundred thirty-eight courses in the Outer circle and one hundred thirty-seven courses in the Expanding circle. All information including course title, course

description and reading of all courses, together with were input into the database. The users of the database can search for information by using any keywords regarding university, school or faculty, title of an undergraduate program, course title, course description, reading materials and content of the courses.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

By utilizing the current technology, this project offers a convenient resource which provides valuable information on the literature curricula of a diverse and inclusive cohort of international English programs. With the resource we have developed, https://www.literature-resource.com/, educators and learners can explore the diverse literary trends of the world's best institutions, and those still growing, in seconds, with the tip of their fingers. With this database, educators have a framework of materials from which to guide their text selection in literature curriculum development.

For those who are interested in our online resource, it should be noted that there are some courses that provide neither course information nor the list of reading materials due to the confidentiality restrictions of their institutions. Interestingly, there were some courses which did not provide reading lists, but did offer the wide scope of their literary area. These courses offered freedom and flexibility in the individual management of literature education. In addition, it is a challenge for the research team to keep the information in the online resource updated.

In the near future, the research team is interested in expanding the project in order to have a deeper exploration of English literature curricula in Thailand and in ASEAN. This area encompasses a diverse cohort of countries located in both the Outer and Expanding circles of Kachru's three concentric circles of English. With our hope, this project will be able to share knowledge and help one another by utilizing technology to bring ideas in the world of literature education together.

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