



Empowering EFL Student Writers through a Genre-Based Approach with Critical Pedagogy: Tracing Sociopolitical Consciousness through Freire's Ten Values and Sociopolitical Consciousness Assessment

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Abstract

Built on our previous research (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), which emphasized students' criticality and argumentative writing skills through a genre-based critical pedagogy approach, this study examines how classroom interactions, as observed through Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, contributed to 32 college students' sense of empowerment in academic discussions. Data sources included recorded classroom observations interpreted by Freire's (2005) Ten Values and a sociopolitical consciousness assessment (Baker & Brookins, 2014), analyzed by two raters. A mixed-methods analysis revealed the participants' highest engagement with Value 5 (teacher-initiated dialogue on real-world issues) and Value 10 (a supportive teacher-student relationship). These findings highlight the teacher's role as a facilitator fostering co-learning in line with Freire's concept of dialogue. Other values receiving high ratings included Value 8, emphasizing critical discussions on societal issues, a foundation for sociopolitical consciousness, Value 2, recognizing students' realities, Value 7, showing mutual respect, and Value 6, encouraging students to challenge societal norms. These findings aligned with qualitative comments from the two raters and the Sociopolitical Consciousness (SPC) Assessment (Baker & Brookins, 2014). The participants expressed highest sociopolitical awareness in Equality and Rights, Collective Action, Responsibility for the Poor, and Sociopolitical Awareness, while Localized Community Efficacy scored the lowest. These findings indicated that the integrative genre-based approach combined with critical pedagogy, as implemented in our previous work, could effectively empower the participants and fostered their sociopolitical consciousness.

1. Introduction

This study explores the development of sociopolitical consciousness (SPC) among EFL students, a core component of critical pedagogy that seeks to cultivate awareness of and action against social injustices and inequities. Freire (2005) defines SPC as the ability to critically analyze societal structures, recognize inequities, and engage in transformative actions. Similarly, Upadhyay et al. (2020) view SPC as individuals' role in political actions to understand the challenges that they would face within their social, economic, and cultural contexts. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive view of SPC, combining a foundational understanding of critical awareness with a focus on political engagement. This conceptualization aligns with Baker and Brookins (2014), who emphasize that SPC encompasses awareness of societal inequities, belief in collective action, and a commitment to advancing social justice.

In the field of EFL writing, fostering students' sociopolitical consciousness presents both challenges and opportunities. It encourages learners to engage with critical issues while also mastering language and critical skills (Chun, 2015; Giroux, 2004). However, although critical pedagogy has been widely explored in EFL education (Janks, 2019; Pennycook, 2021), there remains a gap in understanding how students develop SPC through specific pedagogical models and assessment tools in writing classrooms. Previous studies have primarily explored the development of students' critical thinking development through genre-based pedagogy (Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008), or have examined language learning from broader sociocultural perspectives (Norton, 2013). However, few have investigated the intersection of classroom dialogue and the assessment of sociopolitical consciousness as a means of tracing the emergence of critical awareness.

This study builds on our earlier work (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), where we developed the Critical Pedagogy Writing Model and implemented it in a 2022 Academic Writing course for 32 Business English major students at a small university in Bangkok. Over the course of 15 weeks, the course was taught using the model, which integrates Feez's (1998) Teaching-Learning Cycle from the genre-based approach with Freire's problem-posing approach. The dialogic method was embedded in learning tasks centered on social issues. The findings demonstrated significant improvements in students' critical thinking and writing abilities following the intervention.

To extend this work, we adopt a critical orientation that integrates Feez's (1998) structured genre-based pedagogy with Freire's (2005) critical pedagogy principles, aiming to explore how sociopolitical consciousness can be fostered in EFL writing. While our previous study used a pretest-posttest analysis to assess writing and critical thinking outcomes, this study addresses a key gap by investigating the process of SPC development through multiple lenses. Through an analysis of two data sources—recorded classroom observations grounded in Freire's Ten Values, and a sociopolitical consciousness assessment (Baker & Brookins, 2014)—this study would provide a more understanding of how SPC evolves in an EFL writing context.

Classroom observations based on Freire's values, such as participatory, situated, critical, and democratic dimensions, provided insights into students' engagement within a dialogic learning environment. The sociopolitical consciousness assessment further would deepen our understanding of critical consciousness. While those previous studies focused solely on discourse analysis or shifts in attitudes (Janks, 2019; Norton, 2013), this study provides a more comprehensive view on SPC development in EFL student writers. To address this gap, we pose a key research question in this research:

How do classroom interactions, viewed through Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, foster students' empowerment in academic discussions?

The findings could contribute to the field of critical language pedagogy by revealing how genre-based instruction, combined with Freirean dialogic pedagogy, can serve as a transformative space for EFL student writers. By tracing SPC development through this critical orientation, this research extends current discussions on critical pedagogy in EFL writing and provides an empirical framework for integrating SPC assessment into EFL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

In EFL contexts, genre-based writing instruction and critical pedagogy have frequently been explored independently, with limited research examining how their integration can foster sociopolitical consciousness—particularly in localized settings.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how Thai college students develop sociopolitical awareness through a critical orientation to argumentative writing. This orientation integrates a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-informed genre-based approach (Feez, 1998) with Freirean dialogic pedagogy, emphasizing both criticality with writing development and critical engagement with real-world issues. Accordingly, this review discusses how this integrated pedagogy fosters student empowerment through reflective, socially engaged writing.

2.1 Integrating Genre-Based Writing and Critical Pedagogy: A Critical Orientation

In this study, we implemented a critical orientation that integrates the genre-based teaching cycle (Feez, 1998), grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with Freirean critical pedagogy. From an SFL perspective, genre instruction equips learners with linguistic resources required for navigating and producing socially situated texts (Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008). When combined with Freire's (2005) principles of dialogue, critical reflection, and social justice, writing instruction moves beyond a traditional focus on form and structure. Instead, writing becomes a transformative practice—serving as a means to cultivate critical consciousness, foster resistance, and promote social change.

In our earlier work (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), we implemented this integrated pedagogy through classroom activities with emphases on critical dialogue, democratic participation, and two writing tasks addressing social issues—educational inequality and youth activism. Drawing on Janks' (2010) notion that literacy should serve both access and transformation, our approach positioned students as meaning-makers who interrogate and reshape the discourses that shape their lived experiences. Rather than viewing writing solely as formal reproduction of writing genres, this integration reframes it as a critical inquiry process. Students not only acquire genre conventions but also learn to challenge dominant narratives, where they contribute their voices to public discourse. As such, this integrated framework forms the pedagogical and conceptual foundation of the current study.

2.2 Empowering EFL Writers through Freirean Dialogic Pedagogy and Ten Core Values

Freire's dialogic pedagogy centers education as a collaborative, reflective, and emancipatory process. Rejecting the "banking model" of passive knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970), it calls for co-construction of knowledge rooted in learners' lived experiences. Through praxis—reflection and action—students gain agency to engage with societal structures and challenge injustices. Applied to EFL writing, this pedagogy shifts instruction from linguistic accuracy to purposeful communication grounded in students' realities (Janks, 2010; Shor, 1992). In sociopolitically sensitive contexts like Thailand, this approach enables students to explore identity, positionality, and power through writing that reflects their values and concerns. Within our teaching approach, Freire's (2005) dialogic principles were embedded in scaffolded genre tasks, peer discussion, and reflective activities. These encouraged students to examine their socio-cultural environments and articulate informed positions. Writing consequently became a process of empowerment—an academic and civic act fostering critical consciousness.

To analyze students' development, this study employs Freire's (2005) Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy—love, hope, humility, faith, dialogue, problem-posing education, critical consciousness, praxis, humanization, and transformation (Darder, 2015; Freire, 2005). These values serve not as abstract ideals but as lived principles embedded in classroom relationships, writing practices, and reflection.

In our research context, values such as dialogue and humility are observed in students' willingness to listen, rethink, and revise. Love and hope emerge in their aspirations for justice and equity, while praxis becomes visible when personal experiences are linked to broader calls for change. Through Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, the study captures ethical and cultural dimensions of students' voice—particularly salient in EFL settings, where critique need to navigate nuanced sociopolitical terrains (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2021). As such, this interpretive lens enables us to explore a deeper understanding of how students grow as ethical, critically aware participants in both academic and public spheres.

2.3 Sociopolitical Consciousness in EFL Contexts

According to Freire (2005), sociopolitical consciousness involves an awareness of how structural and historical forces shape human experiences and a commitment to engage in actions that promote social justice. In EFL contexts, writing is not merely a

linguistic exercise but a powerful space for identity negotiation, critical reflection, and political engagement. As critical applied linguists such as Morgan (1998) and Norton and Toohey (2004) argue, language education should empower learners to interrogate the social realities embedded in discourse. When genre-based instruction is integrated with critical pedagogy—as applied in our prior work—it enables students to meet academic writing demands, and also creates space to express their critical voices and engage with social issues. Through this dual focus, writing, as viewed in our research context, becomes a means for advocacy, resistance, and reflection.

A number of studies have demonstrated how writing can support the articulation of students' critical awareness (e.g., Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025) and culturally grounded perspectives (e.g., Shin & Crookes, 2005). However, little attention has been paid to how students' sociopolitical consciousness specifically emerges within the context of EFL argumentative writing classrooms. This gap would be particularly pronounced in studies that examine writing as a transformative practice—one that simultaneously develops students' academic writing abilities and fosters their sociopolitical awareness. As a result, the present study addresses this gap by tracing students' sociopolitical consciousness through recorded classroom observations guided by Freire's (2005) Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy and Baker and Brookins' (2014) sociopolitical consciousness assessment, this study investigates how students' voices, positions, and critical awareness emerge through an integrated genre-based and critical pedagogy approach. Conducted in an EFL context marked by diverse sociocultural backgrounds, the present study contributes to the growing call for context-responsive, critically informed writing pedagogies that empower students as both academic writers and socially engaged citizens.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Context and the Course

This study was conducted at a small public university in Bangkok, Thailand. The university offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. It also prioritizes encouraging local development through academic services that benefit society and nearby communities, rather than focusing solely on academic excellence. The enrolled students generally have moderate academic abilities, with about half coming from provincial schools across Thailand. To empower research participants, we chose an

Academic Writing course, and designed it for teaching them to write well-structured essays using the dialogic method grounded in critical pedagogy. The 15-week course was held in the second semester of the 2022 academic year, and incorporated the dialogic method throughout the semester to teach argumentative writing.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

This study investigates how classroom interactions, viewed through the lens of Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, contributed to students' sense of empowerment in academic discussions. Built on our previous work (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), this research extends the analysis of an instructional intervention in which the participants were taught argumentative writing through an integrated model that combined Feez's (1998) genre-based Teaching–Learning Cycle with five core principles of Freirean critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005). These principles included democratic classroom practices, student empowerment, social justice-oriented writing tasks, active student participation, and critical dialogue to foster deeper engagement. Our prior study employed a one-group pretest–posttest experimental design to examine the development of the participants' writing abilities and critical thinking. In the present study, we further explore their sociopolitical consciousness (SPC) that emerged throughout the teaching-learning process. Adopting a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), we analyzed two primary data sources: (1) three recorded classroom observations, interpreted using Freire's (2005) Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy. Two raters independently analyzed the classroom dialogues captured in the videos, and their qualitative comments were examined to provide additional evidence of the pedagogical practices implemented during instruction; and (2) the participants' sociopolitical consciousness, assessed using Baker and Brookins' (2014) framework. These allowed us to trace how the critical genre-based instruction influenced the participants' development of SPC during the intervention period.

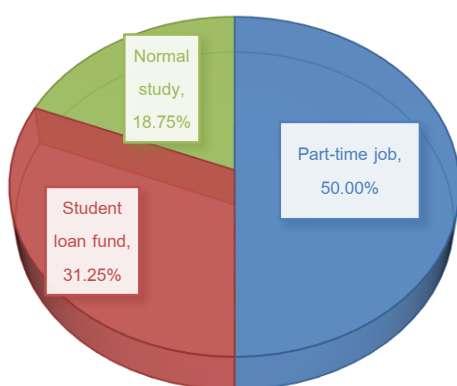
3.3 Participants

The participants of this study were 32 second-year students majoring in Business English at a government university in Bangkok, Thailand. Using purposive sampling method, we were able to gain insight of the target group's experience and knowledge. Having taught and known this group of participants for two years, we recognized that they were a potential group for applying the principles of critical

pedagogy, given their low socio-economic status and marginalized backgrounds. More than half of the participants (59.38%) had attended secondary schools outside of Bangkok. Additionally, around 50% held part-time jobs, and 31.25% had taken out student loans from the Student Loan Fund as illustrated in Figure 1. Given this context, most participants were regarded as marginalized learners in this research context.

Figure 1

Participants' Socio-economic Background.



3.4 Research Instruments

In this study, we used two key research instruments. First, we used a classroom observation checklist based on Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, including participatory, situated, critical, democratic, dialogic, desocialization, multicultural, research-oriented, activist, and affective dimensions. Two raters evaluated these values using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Second, we used an SPC assessment developed by Baker and Brookins (2014) to evaluate sociopolitical development across seven dimensions: Sociopolitical Awareness, Global Belief in a Just World-Modified, Collective Responsibility for the Poor, Equality and Rights, Belief in Collective Action, Localized Community Efficacy, and Problem-Solving Efficacy. A 5-point Likert scale was adopted to assess sociopolitical consciousness. These diverse data sources provided triangulation, strengthening the reliability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

3.5 Teaching Procedure

The development stage focused on designing and validating research instruments. Critical pedagogy principles were synthesized to create a lesson plan emphasizing the dialogic method, which was then validated by three experts using item-objective congruence (IOC) (Ayre & Scally, 2014), and piloted before implementation. The IOC value (0.84) confirmed validity of the lesson plan. Learning activities and materials were refined based on the participants' feedback during the pilot study. In the implementation stage, a 15-week Academic Writing course empowered the participants through the genre-based approach integrated with critical pedagogy. This integrative model contains five stages: (1) pre-writing, (2) developing the context, (3) modeling and deconstructing the text, (4) joint construction of the text, and (5) independent construction of the text (See Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025). In teaching, we used the dialogic method (Freire, 2005), emphasizing teacher facilitation, democratic classrooms, and generative themes. Between weeks 8 and 15, the participants wrote two essays: the first focused on youth-led political movements, and the second addressed educational inequality in Thailand. This study explored how classroom interactions during implementation, as observed through Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, fostered students' sense of empowerment in academic discussions.

3.6 Research Procedure

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data over 15 weeks. In week 1, students completed a sociopolitical consciousness assessment. Classroom interactions were video-recorded in weeks 3, 6, and 12, with observations based on Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy. To ensure students could fully express their ideas, they were allowed to use Thai if they struggled with English. In week 15, a second sociopolitical consciousness assessment was conducted. The data from classroom observations in weeks 3, 6, and 12, as well as the data from the sociopolitical consciousness assessment in weeks 1 and 15, were analyzed.

3.7 Data Sources and Analysis

In this study, we used two data sources—three recorded classroom observations and an SPC assessment. First, the classroom observation checklist was analyzed. Two raters reviewed videos recorded in weeks 3, 6, and 12 of the Academic Writing course, rating ten statements on a five-point Likert scale. Quantitative analysis of the ratings

(mean and standard deviation) was used to assess alignment with Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy. To ensure validity, two raters analyzed the classroom dialogues captured in the videos, and their comments were qualitatively analyzed to provide additional evidence of the pedagogical practices employed. Second, the SPC assessment, based on Baker and Brookins (2014), explored the participants' sociopolitical consciousness development across seven dimensions: Sociopolitical Awareness (SPA), Global Belief in a Just World-Modified (GBJW-M), Collective Responsibility for the Poor (CRP), Equality and Rights (ER), Belief in Collective Action (BCA), Localized Community Efficacy (LCE), and Problem-Solving Efficacy (PSE). Since the original 36-item model lacked a rating scale for SPC development, a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was adopted. Descriptive statistics were used to assess students' SPC development, with responses from week 1 and week 15 compared using dependent-samples t-tests.

3.8 Ethical Considerations in the Teacher-Researcher Role

In this research, we acknowledge the ethical concerns related to the dual role of teacher-researcher, particularly regarding potential bias and power dynamics in the classroom (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Mercer, 2007). To mitigate these concerns, we implemented measures to ensure research integrity and minimize threats to the participants' participation and responses. While one researcher took on the role of the teacher during instruction, data analysis was conducted by two independent raters to ensure objectivity and reliability in coding students' classroom observations sociopolitical consciousness assessments. Also, the participants were informed of their voluntary participation, assurances of confidentiality, and anonymity in data reporting, where we followed ethical guidelines for educational research (British Educational Research Association, 2018). These measures helped maintain the validity and trustworthiness of our findings while safeguarding the participants from coercion.

4. Results

Research Question: How do classroom interactions, viewed through Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, foster students' empowerment in academic discussions?

In our previous research (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), a genre-based approach and critical pedagogy were found to be the powerful tools to enhance students' writing abilities and critical thinking. In this study, we aimed to trace the students' sociopolitical

consciousness by analyzing their videoed class observations based on Freire's Ten Values and a sociopolitical consciousness assessment.

4.1 Students' Empowerment Examined through Classroom Observation

Designed based on Freire's (2005) Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy such as participatory, democratic, dialogic, and so on, the classroom observation checklist was used to examine the students' empowerment through three class discussions. The score rated by two raters were quantitatively analyzed by descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation to examine Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy utilized over the three discussions. Overall, the student empowerment had been developed over the timeframe of the three class discussions in week 3, 6, and 12 as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Improvement of Students Empowerment Based on Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy in Three Video Recordings

No.	Statements	Recording 1			Recording 2			Recording 3		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
1	The learning process is interactive and cooperative, and students do a lot of discussion.	3.00	0.00	Moderate	4.00	0.00	High	5.00	0.00	Very High
2	The course materials are based on the students' experience, culture, and local contexts.	4.00	0.00	High	4.00	0.00	High	4.50	0.70	Very High
3	Students reflect critically on their own knowledge and language and the quality of their learning process, e.g., how we know, what we know, and how we can learn what we need to know.	3.00	0.00	Moderate	4.00	0.00	High	5.00	0.00	Very High
4	Students have equal speaking rights in the dialogue as well as the right to negotiate the curriculum.	2.00	0.00	Low	3.50	2.12	High	5.00	0.00	Very High

Table 1

Improvement of Students Empowerment Based on Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy in Three Video Recordings (Cont.)

No.	Statements	Recording 1			Recording 2			Recording 3		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning
5	The teacher initiates dialogue around problems and invites students to build the dialogue with their words.	5.00	0.00	Very High	5.00	0.00	Very High	5.00	0.00	Very High
6	The dialogue persuades students to be active in the classroom and challenges the myth and authority.	3.50	0.70	High	4.00	0.00	High	5.00	0.00	Very High
7	The class respects multiple cultures and is critical towards discrimination and inequality.	5.00	0.00	Very High	4.00	1.41	High	4.50	0.70	Very High
8	The classroom is research-oriented, expecting students to be researchers inquiring into problems posed by daily experience, society, and academic material.	5.00	0.00	Very High	3.00	0.00	Moderate	5.00	0.00	Very High
9	The critical dialogue also seeks action outcomes from the students, perceiving themselves as the creator of knowledge and change agent.	3.00	0.00	Moderate	4.00	0.00	High	4.50	0.70	Very High
10	The classroom is the place where students can develop a close friendly relationship with the teacher in a range of emotions from humor to compassion to indignation.	5.00	0.00	Very High	5.00	0.00	Very High	5.00	0.00	Very High
Grand Mean		3.85	0.07	High	4.05	0.35	High	4.85	0.07	Very High

4.20-5.00 = *Very High*

1.80-2.59 = *Low*

3.40-4.19 = *High*

1.00-1.79 = *Very Low*

2.60-3.39 = *Moderate*

As observed and rated by the two raters, the grand mean of student empowerment, as measured through the classroom observation checklist, steadily increased over the three video recordings. Starting at 3.85 in Recording 1, the score rose slightly to 4.05 in Recording 2, both interpreted as “high” according to the interval categories, before increasing significantly to 4.85 in Recording 3, which was interpreted as “very high.” These findings indicated that the participants were progressively empowered through the dialogic method, which involved provocative questions to stimulate class discussions.

A closer examination reveals that the values rated at the “very high” level were predominantly observed in Discussion 3. Notably, two values consistently received the maximum score of 5.00 from both raters: Value 5, “The teacher initiates dialogue around problems and invites students to build the dialogue with their words,” and Value 10, “The classroom is a place where students develop a close, friendly relationship with the teacher, ranging from humor to compassion to indignation.” These values underscore the teacher’s role as a facilitator who actively engages in dialogue with the participants, embodying Freire’s idea of co-learning, where the teacher and students can learn and teach one another.

The remaining eight values also contributed to interpreting learner empowerment. For instance, Value 8, which focuses on cultivating critical learners, was rated “very high” in Recordings 1 and 3. These values share a common thread: the classroom as a collaborative space for teachers and students to engage in critical conversations about societal issues. Such values form the foundation for empowering students and fostering sociopolitical consciousness.

The “very high” degree of empowerment in Recording 3, compared to the varying levels in the other two recordings, also highlights the importance of Values 2, “Students’ realities recognized in the instruction,” and Value 7, “The class fosters mutual respect.” These reflect Freire’s (2005) concept of humanization, which emphasizes recognizing learners’ dignity, autonomy, and voices, particularly for those marginalized by oppressive systems.

Lastly, Value 6, which emphasizes students’ active roles in challenging societal norms, was rated “very high” in Recording 3 but only “high” in the earlier recordings. This value aligns with Freire’s vision of transformative action, where teaching aims to

empower learners to challenge oppression and enact social change. As Freire (2005) asserts, critical consciousness actually leads to practical action to transform societal structures. The consistently high-to-very-high ratings across these values highlight how empowerment and sociopolitical consciousness were fostered in the participants through their participation in a democratic classroom with social justice-oriented writing tasks used during the intervention of our previous work.

To further trace the development of the participants' empowerment and sociopolitical consciousness, the quantitative results from the observation checklists were triangulated with qualitative data from rater comments. As an unbiased insider, Rater 1's observations provided a clearer lens to interpret these findings. He noted:

Very strongly at this time, especially the second group's topic 'technology and education' — where the point the teacher initiated the discussion among the students. *Each question the teacher made was 'open-ended' of How, Why, What caused this and that ... So the answer became more descriptive with details from students. The teacher produced the well-crafted questions.*

(Rater 1_Recording 3, emphasis added)

The excerpts given by Rater 1's comment emphasized the classroom condition conducted based on dialogic approach by which the teacher created generative themes with provocative questions to initiate dialogue. As commented by Rater 1 in video Recording 3, the teacher originated the discussion among the participants with well-crafted open-ended questions of *How? Why? and What caused this and that?* all of which could help open up the dialogue and make the classroom dynamic. Also, these questions could well represent the teachers' attempt to create dialogue around problems corresponding with Freire's (2005) fifth value of critical pedagogy, in which the teacher repositioned himself as the facilitator to foster the dialogue.

Consequently, the classroom was a safe place filled with friendly relationship in a range of emotions which was aligned with Freire's tenth value of critical pedagogy, as can be seen in the following comment by Rater 2.

Dialogue allowed for diverse opinions to be expressed, and the teacher acted as a facilitator for sensitive topics. Students demonstrated their inquiry abilities when addressing issues faced by the LGBTQ community. Laughter and a close, friendly relationship between groups and the teacher were evident, even during intense discussions. Overall, the sessions pretty much fostered a supportive and open space for learning and discussion.

(Rater 2_Recording 1, emphasis added)

Compared to Discussion 3, Discussion 2 exhibited a higher frequency of values rated “high.” For instance, Values 2 (“Course materials are based on students’ experience, culture, and local contexts.”) and 6 (“Dialogue persuades students to be active in the classroom and challenges myths and authority.”) were rated “high” in Discussions 1 and 2, and then “very high” in the final discussion. These values conform to critical pedagogy principles, which emphasize examining unequal social structures and power imbalances within students’ sociopolitical contexts. This suggests that course materials should be designed based on learners’ real-world experiences, cultures, and local contexts, as highlighted in Value 2. This quantitative finding is supported by qualitative data from Rater 1, as follows:

The presenters went to the field to interview the targeted groups, such as farmers, LGBTQ, making it more interesting to the classmates, and the topics of ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘inequality of education’ are naturally around them. Even if some issues of the ‘protest’ maybe controversial but it’s there on the BKK streets. The strong point is that the presenters went to the field and talked to the targeted groups, hence, making it more intimate to connect with the given topics.

(Rater 1_Recording 2, emphasis added)

The above comment by Rater 1 clearly demonstrated Freire’s dialogic method attempting to encourage learners to build up their own knowledge based on the generative themes derived from their real-world problem. As illustrated, the topics

related to farmers and LGBTQ were obtained from the out-of-class research in which the presenters had a direct contact with the interviewees who were their targeted group. Also, although the topic of protesting seemed to be controversial, the presented data were obtained from the field, the BKK street in particular. The knowledge based on the participants' real-world experience was thus regarded as the crucial resource to help them become active in challenging the myth and authority possessed by the privileged class in their society as commented by Rater 2.

All the presenters seemed to be focused on encouraging the student audiences to question and challenge social issues. For instance, Group 1 (at Minutes: 12:23) and the teacher collaborated to address the issue of education inequality by highlighting the Thai public education loan (กยศ.), where student applicants are required to prove themselves as “good” individuals. This topic appeared to challenge conventional Thai educational ideologies, where such opportunities are reserved for individuals considered “good,” despite the difficulty of objectively defining “good.”

(Rater 2_Recording 2, emphasis added)

Despite the positive outcomes of learner empowerment through the dialogic method, some values received “moderate” ratings, primarily in Discussion 1. These included Value 1, interactive learning process, Value 3, students' criticality on their own knowledge, and Value 9, learners transformed as change agents. Furthermore, Value 4, students' right to engage in the dialogical process received a low rating.

Analysis of Discussion 1 suggests that the class may not have been sufficiently interactive to fully accommodate student participation. Alternatively, the participants may have been unfamiliar with a writing class focused on developing their sociopolitical consciousness and addressing real-world problems. Consequently, they may not have fully embraced their roles as critical learners and agents of social change.

Also, the higher ratings in Discussions 2 and 3 indicate that the participants' learning behaviors evolved as they engaged more deeply with this critical pedagogy-oriented class. This is evidenced by the very high levels of empowerment observed in

these discussions and the overall increase in the grand means across the three recordings, culminating in the highest level in the final recording.

These views were conformed to Rater 1, who commented on Value 1 that despite the interaction, only three to four participants participated in class discussion although the teacher tried to bring some of the participants to class discussion as displayed in the excerpt below.

Easy to see that the interaction took place throughout the entire video. *However, it is noticeable that only 3-4 students dominated the whole discussion at all time. Despite the teacher's trying to persuade some students at the back to speak, they still don't show response.*

(Rater 1_Recording 1, emphasis added)

Additionally, in Value 9, regarding learners' self-awareness as change agents to seek for action outcomes, Rater 1 also commented that in Discussion 1, there was not any sign as change agents from the participants to act for social transformation and most dialogues were dependent on their personal experience as expressed in the comment below.

The teacher tried to put the conclusion at the end of the video, *but no indicators to lead them to be the change agent. The topics and time constraint might not give enough rooms to see the further actions. No clear conclusion at the end of the presentation which might indicate signs of change in student's actions or plans.* Most of the dialogues are merely *sharing personal experiences.*

(Rater 1_Recording 1, emphasis added)

More precisely, Value 4, which is related to learners' equal right to speak and negotiate the curriculum, received the lowest mean score from the two raters ($\bar{X} = 2.00$), Rater 2 argued that, even though all participants seemed to have equal speaking right, some of them exercised their right to speak and most of them did not express their ideas as illustrated in the comment below.

Yes, they have. But still, only some exercised their rights to speak up. Still, most do not exert their ideas. Out of 30 students, only four to six of them are the frequent speakers. The others may feel fear to express ideas, or the teachers might not try hard enough to hear the voice of the back class.

(Rater 2_Recording 1, emphasis added)

The moderate ratings for Values 1, 3, and 9, and the low rating for Value 4 in Discussion 1 may be attributed to the participants' unfamiliarity with the critical pedagogical practices implemented in the classroom.

In contrast to the principles of critical pedagogy, which encourage learners to interrogate injustice and inequality within their own sociopolitical contexts, Thai EFL learners, deeply rooted in a sociopolitical culture that emphasizes obedience, may be unaccustomed to critically examining social issues. This may have led to lower engagement in class discussions, particularly during the initial stages of Discussion 1, resulting in the moderate and low ratings observed by the raters.

However, despite these initial challenges, the results demonstrate a progressive increase in student empowerment across the three class discussions. More specifically, student empowerment rated at the "very high" level was found mostly in Discussion 3, subsequently followed by the "high" level, most of which was found in Discussion 2. Finally, the "moderate" and "low" levels were predominantly evident in Discussion 1. This progression indicates that as the participants engaged more deeply with the critical pedagogy-oriented class, their learning behaviors evolved and their sense of empowerment increased.

The data indicated that the participants' empowerment could be traced through the integrative genre-based critical pedagogy approach we employed in our previous work (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), which fostered both their criticality in writing skills and sociopolitical consciousness. The findings are now triangulated by the data derived from the participants' assessment in sociopolitical consciousness (Baker & Brookins, 2014), as in the following sub-section.

4.2 Students' Empowerment Examined through an SPC Assessment

To understand the participants' sense of empowerment in academic discussions, we examined their sociopolitical consciousness using the assessment form adapted from

Baker and Brookins (2014). This assessment comprises seven dimensions—SPA, GBJW-M, CRP, ER, BCA, LCE, PSE. The participants' responses were evaluated at weeks 1 and 15 of the writing class and analyzed using a dependent-samples t-test along with descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The results demonstrate a significant increase in students' sociopolitical consciousness following the implementation of critical pedagogy. These findings are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Comparison of Students' Sociopolitical Consciousness in All Dimensions

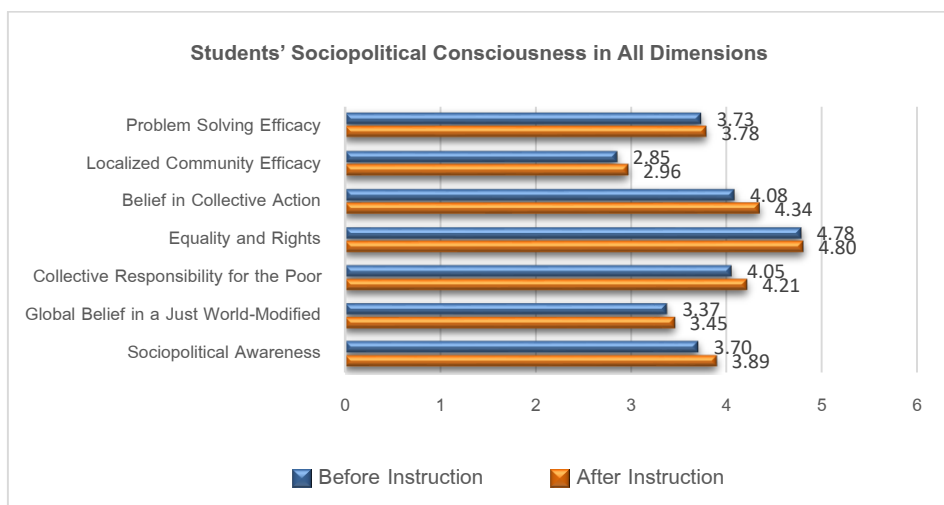


Figure 2 shows that, after the instruction, the participants had developed their sociopolitical consciousness in all 7 dimensions. In particular, they performed their highest level of sociopolitical consciousness in Dimension 4, Equality and Rights (ER), (\bar{X} = 4.80), subsequently followed by Dimension 5, Belief in Collective Action (BCA) (\bar{X} = 4.34), Dimension 3, Collective Responsibility for the Poor (CRP) (\bar{X} = 4.21), and Dimension 1, Sociopolitical Awareness (SPA) (\bar{X} = 3.89). However, Dimension 6, Localized Community Efficacy (LCE), was found the lowest dimension both before and after the instruction.

While a slight increase was observed in Dimension 4 (equality and rights), it consistently ranked highest in terms of students' mean scores of sociopolitical consciousness, both before (4.78) and after (4.80) instruction. Given the frequent focus on economic, educational, and gender inequality in class discussions, these topics likely contributed to students' heightened awareness of social inequalities.

Dimension 5 (belief in collective action) exhibited the most significant improvement in sociopolitical consciousness, increasing from 4.08 to 4.34. According to Freire's framework, the highest level of critical consciousness is expressed through a willingness to transform society. The substantial improvement in Dimension 5 may therefore reflect students' growing desire for social change.

These findings indicated that the integrative genre-based approach incorporating elements of critical pedagogy, as employed in our previous work (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025), could effectively empower the participants. This is evident in their increased mean scores in Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy, where all values are indicative of enhanced student engagement. Also, the data show a clear development of the participants' sociopolitical consciousness following the implementation of critical pedagogy in the writing classroom.

Overall, both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the participants could be empowered to engage in critical discussions and challenge educational and social injustice through a writing class centered on social justice-oriented tasks. Their empowerment was clearly fostered by our critical, genre-based writing instruction, which cultivated their critical consciousness. Our integrative approach is consistent with Shor (1993), asserting that a critical, democratic classroom can promote students' active participation, critical reflection, and the confidence to question power dynamics and advocate for social transformation. In an EFL writing class, empowerment emerges when students choose to voice their opinions and negotiate societal change. To foster their sociopolitical consciousness, teachers need to implement relevant teaching approaches or tools to cultivate these values. These certainly include critical dialogue as a central means of interaction between teachers and students, and writing tasks related to students' lived experiences, which allow them to express themselves through both content and language. This can provide a private space for them to express their voices related to class activities and the world outside the classroom.

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion of Main Findings

The findings of this study suggest that the integrative genre-based approach combined with critical pedagogy implemented in the EFL writing classroom—an

instructional model we previously used to enhance the participants' criticality in writing skills (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025)—could empower the participants and fostered their sociopolitical consciousness. In this model, we applied a critical pedagogical lens by integrating the SFL-informed genre-based teaching cycle (Feez, 1998) with Freirean principles of critical pedagogy. Feez's teaching cycle could support the participants in exploring and producing socially situated texts (Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008). This cycle was further reinforced by Freire's (2005) emphasis on dialogue, critical reflection, and social justice, which we operationalized in our previous work through classroom activities focused on critical dialogue, democratic participation, and two writing tasks that addressed pressing social issues—educational inequality and youth activism. As a result, the integration of these pedagogies helped cultivate the participants' critical thinking, a key component in enhancing their writing skills, while simultaneously nurturing their critical consciousness. In this way, the teaching and learning process we employed became a transformative practice within this research context.

The approach we employed could transform teaching and learning into a process of critical inquiry, and this enabled the participants not only to grasp genre conventions and enhance their critical thinking—essential for developing argumentative writing (Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025)—but also to question and challenge dominant narratives. This process then fostered the participants to develop their sociopolitical consciousness, as evidenced by the findings analyzed through Freire's (2005) Ten Values and the Sociopolitical Consciousness Assessment (Baker & Brookins, 2014).

This transformation was clearly visible through the data from videoed class observations analyzed using Freire's Ten Values of Critical Pedagogy. Furthermore, the participants' sociopolitical consciousness was notably heightened after the instruction. In addition, the most significant improvements in sociopolitical consciousness were observed in Dimension 5, Belief in Collective Action (BCA), which reflected the participants' desire to contribute to societal change, and Dimension 1, Sociopolitical Awareness (SA), which indicated their growing understanding of sociopolitical issues both in their local communities and the broader national context. These changes were particularly relevant given that the class discussions focused on urgent social issues, including the impact of politics on inequality in Thailand.

These findings are consistent with previous research on the development of students' sociopolitical consciousness through critical pedagogy. Studies show that

engaging students in discussions of social issues can heighten their awareness of local challenges, such as suicide and violence, while also encouraging them to propose potential solutions (Jiménez-Salazar, 2020). Similarly, Pham et al. (2023) found that students developed a deeper understanding of structural inequalities, and Gómez and Cammarota (2022) reported that students' worldviews shifted alongside an increased awareness of social injustices. Collectively, the findings of these studies suggest that integrating sociopolitical consciousness (SPC) into EFL writing instruction can strengthen the transformative impact of critical pedagogy by fostering students' critical engagement with societal issues and empowering them to advocate for change.

From this perspective, the participants' empowerment reflected in their heightened sociopolitical awareness could be attributed to several factors. Perhaps most critical was the way we established a democratic classroom environment in our writing instruction. This principle is central to critical pedagogy as meaningful dialogue cannot be successful without it. As Finn (2023) argues, critical pedagogy seeks to empower marginalized individuals, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, by creating democratic classrooms that encourage their voices. In such environments, students are encouraged to confidently share their opinions without fear of judgment or humiliation. In the present study, we emphasized the democratic classroom approach throughout all stages of writing to ensure that the participants felt their classroom as a safe space where their diverse opinions were welcomed. As a result, their voices were respected. This ultimately empowered them to express themselves more clearly and confidently.

In addition to the democratic classroom, the participants' empowerment was further supported by the teacher's role as a facilitator. Instead of imposing a power dynamic where the teacher holds all the knowledge, the teacher-researcher in this study worked collaboratively with the participants to co-construct knowledge. This approach is believed to promote their voices and empower them as active knowledge producers. The non-punitive, collaborative approach allowed students to co-evaluate argumentative essays with their peers and the teacher, enhancing their sense of authorship. As Giroux (1997) asserts, written assignments should be open to critique and debate, with students' voices playing a central role in this process. To achieve this, teachers should support rather than stifle students' freedom.

Clearly, the Freirean dialogic method we employed in this study played a crucial role in developing the participants' sociopolitical consciousness. As Shor (1993) highlights,

everyday social issues can serve as generative themes in student-centered dialogues that aim to develop critical consciousness. In this study, the participants were encouraged to conduct out-of-class research to build knowledge based on their real-life experiences. This combination of classroom dialogue and their real-world experiences consequently helped them deepen their sociopolitical consciousness.

5.2 Research Implications

The findings of this study indicate that a genre-based, Freirean dialogic pedagogy can empower students and enhance their sociopolitical consciousness. First, the integrative approach provides valuable instructional strategies for EFL writing teachers. Although many EFL learners are familiar with process-based writing approaches, teachers should emphasize strategies that help students to generate ideas, a critical step for developing strong texts and improving writing skills (Alemu, 2020). However, teachers need to explain its purpose to prevent misconceptions about its relevance to students' learning goals. Related to this point is the suggestion that the problem-posing method should be used to foster real-life dialogue between teachers and students (Hashemnezhad, 2020). Teachers should initiate generative themes related to students' lived experiences as this allows them to explore real-world contexts and bring that knowledge back into the classroom. Second, teachers could create a democratic classroom environment where students' voices are respected and diverse opinions are welcomed. Trust and positive relationships between students and teachers are important for successful implementation of critical pedagogy, as dialogue cannot occur without the two. Third, during the writing process, teachers should provide opportunities for students to discuss and adjust writing models. This then reinforces the flexibility of writing genres, where collaborative activities, such as peer review, further empower students and enhance their sense of authorship. Finally, this pedagogy not only benefits teachers but also offers valuable insights for researchers in L2 writing and learner empowerment. As such, future studies could explore how dialogic methods foster learner voice, identity, and sociopolitical consciousness in writing classrooms, providing new directions for L2 writing research.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Although the participants' empowerment improved, the teacher's dual role as a researcher might have influenced students' engagement in class discussions. In the

Thai context, where students often view teachers as authority figures, their participation may have been motivated by a desire to meet the teacher's expectations. To solve possible problems with this potential bias, future studies could focus on teacher training programs that equip instructors to apply critical pedagogy and genre-based approaches. Researchers could then assume an observer role, and conduct interviews with both teachers and students to explore their perceptions of these pedagogical practices.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that learner empowerment is key to fostering improvement in various aspects of development. Freire's problem-posing education was essential in this process. This kind of education, through critical dialogue, encourages knowledge construction based on learners' lived experiences and real-world issues. Unlike the banking education, which merely transfers knowledge, problem-posing education involves teachers to co-construct knowledge with students. As such, teachers wishing to implement critical pedagogy should first establish a safe, respectful classroom where dialogue can flourish. They should participate in discussions actively by guiding students with thought-provoking questions, and assisting them with out-of-class research to support knowledge co-construction. Worth mentioning, while challenges related to students' socio-economic backgrounds and political viewpoints may arise, teachers can adapt to these conditions. Moreover, teachers themselves should possess sociopolitical consciousness to recognize and challenge the power dynamics embedded in education. Without this awareness, they cannot effectively help learners break free from the 'pedagogy of the oppressors.'

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