

“Kidding Story Not a Kidding”: The Development of Process Framework for Enhancing Awareness of Creative Communication and Empathy in the Thai Social Context

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Abstract

Kidding remarks in Thai social contexts are often perceived as trivial. However, frequent occurrences may lead to verbal bullying, particularly when the communicator does not consider the feelings of others. This study aims to develop a process framework to enhance awareness of creative communication and empathy in Thai social contexts. Additionally, it seeks to evaluate the experimental results and the disseminated application of the framework in promoting awareness of creative communication and empathy. The tools employed include: 1) a process framework for fostering awareness of creative communication and empathy in Thai social contexts, 2) a creative communication awareness scale, and 3) an empathy measurement scale. Statistical analyses consisted of mean, standard deviation, and repeated measures. The findings are as follows: 1) The process framework for promoting awareness of creative communication and empathy in Thai social contexts is titled “PUETSS.” 2) Experimental and extended applications of the framework revealed statistically significant improvements in students’ awareness of creative communication and empathy at the .05 level. These findings suggest that fostering awareness in communication encourages individuals to think before they speak and consider others’ feelings, ensuring that “kidding” does not harm others.

Keywords: kidding story, awareness, creative communication, empathy

1. Introduction

In Thai society, cultural and linguistic contexts reveal a longstanding tradition of “kidding”, a behavior deeply ingrained in societal norms. This practice stems from a communal penchant for fun and merriment, which has evolved into a distinct cultural characteristic. Examples include humorous and creative kidding through playful songs, such as the children’s rhyme:

“Pom juk kluk nam pla, hen kheer ma nang wai krajong ngong,”

“Pom pia ma lia bai tong, phra tee klong talum tum meng.”

This kidding culture also manifests in comedic tales, riddles, and caricatures conveyed through verbal and non-verbal communication. Despite its lighthearted nature and lack of serious intent, such kidding reflects Thai society’s joviality and sense of humor. However, it can also impact the emotions and mental states of those being kidded (Ngamlue, 2016). Kidding is not unique to Thai society and can also be observed in Western cultures. Phrases like “kidding,” “just kidding,” and “kidding around” convey a similar notion of lighthearted kidding without serious intent. Skalicky, Berger, and Bell (2015) explained that when someone says “just kidding,” it signifies that the preceding words or actions were not meant seriously but were instead humorous in nature.

In contemporary society, playful kidding has sometimes evolved into a tool for bullying, employing words or actions that cause discomfort to the other party. These interactions often conclude with the phrase “just kidding,” implying a lack of seriousness. However, such disclaimers rarely mitigate the negative emotions of the person targeted, as the kidding often leads to feelings of sadness, disappointment, shame, fear, anger, and sometimes even conflict or violence. Chaikittipornlert (2017) noted that kidding is prevalent across all age groups in Thai society, ranging from harmless banter among friends or family to more harmful forms, such as bullying. Regardless of intent, kidding—whether playful or serious—is frequently overlooked or normalized within society. Issues stemming from kidding that escalate into bullying or humiliation often arise from “unawareness” in

communication. Unawareness refers to a lack of knowledge, conceptual understanding, or conscious thought about the potential impact of one's words or actions (Burkhard, 2017). Such challenges can be alleviated if individuals develop an awareness of creative communication, characterized by knowledge, conceptual clarity, and intentionality in speech or behavior to foster positive feelings and avoid resentment. To achieve this, communicators must understand social and cultural contexts, sensitivity to others' emotions, and empathy. Barker (2008) defined empathy as the ability to perceive, understand, and respond to others' emotional and cognitive states. Empathy has been shown to reduce kidding behaviors. Research by Platt et al. (2022) found a correlation between empathy and kidding, both in its playful and aggressive forms.

Given these considerations, this study aims to develop a framework for promoting awareness of creative communication and empathy within the context of Thai society. The objective is to enable learners to think before speaking, understand others' feelings before communicating, and foster harmonious and stress-free interactions, thereby minimizing conflicts and disputes.

2. Method

This study aimed to develop a process framework to promote awareness of creative communication and empathy in the context of Thai society. Additionally, it sought to evaluate the implementation and broader application of this framework to enhance these skills. The research employed a Research and Development (R&D) methodology, consisting of four main phases as follows:

2.1 Phase 1: Problem Identification and Data Collection (Analysis: R_1)

Step 1: Analysis of the Problem

The researcher investigated the issues by utilizing a questionnaire titled "Experiences of Being Kidding." This tool was validated using a rating scale, achieving the highest level of reliability (Mean = 5.00, S.D. = 0.00). The questionnaire was administered to students from the Faculty of Education at Silpakorn University during the 2023 academic year. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (Nillapun, 2015) with a confidence level of 95%, resulting in a sample of 349 participants. The analysis revealed that the problem of kidding in Thai society stemmed from a lack of awareness of creative communication and empathy. Many communicators failed to think before speaking or consider the feelings of others.

Step 2: Literature Review

The researcher reviewed relevant literature and studies on awareness of creative communication and empathy. The findings were synthesized to construct a framework aimed at promoting these qualities within the Thai social context.

2.2 Phase 2: Designing and Developing the Framework (Development: D_1)

Step 1: Framework Development

Data synthesized from the literature review was utilized to develop a process framework to enhance awareness of creative communication and empathy in Thai society.

Step 2: Development of an Awareness Assessment Tool

A situational assessment tool consisting of 20 items was developed to measure awareness of creative communication. This tool was reviewed by nine experts using a 5-point rating scale. The evaluation showed a high level of quality (Mean = 4.67–5.00, SD = 0.00–0.50).

The tool underwent a tryout phase, and item analysis was conducted using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine discrimination indices, which ranged from 0.31 to 0.78. The reliability, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, was 0.89.

Step 3: Development of an Empathy Assessment Tool

A 20-item self-assessment tool based on Likert's 5-point scale was created to measure empathy. The expert evaluation indicated high quality (Mean = 4.78–5.00, SD = 0.44–0.00). The tool was also subjected to item-total correlation analysis, yielding discrimination indices ranging from 0.63 to 0.85. The reliability of the tool, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, was 0.96.

2.3 Phase 3: Implementation of the Framework (Implementation: R_2)

The framework was implemented using a one-group experimental time series design (Punthai, 2016) to assess the development of creative communication awareness and empathy.

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The experiment involved 29 first-year students from the Thai Language Program, Faculty of Education, Silpakorn University, in the 2024 academic year, selected through cluster sampling. Students participated in five learning activities sessions based on the framework. After each session, they completed the awareness and empathy assessments. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA to evaluate the progression of students' awareness and empathy.

2.4 Phase 4: Framework Dissemination (Disseminating: D₂)

The developed framework was disseminated and applied in other higher education institutions across different regions of Thailand:

- Northern Region: Chiang Mai University
- Central Region: Ramkhamhaeng University
- Northeastern Region: Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University
- Southern Region: Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University

The framework was implemented using a one-group experimental time series design (Punthai, 2016) to assess the development of creative communication awareness and empathy.

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The researcher trained instructors from these institutions to implement the framework in their teaching. Following the sessions, students completed the same assessment tools. The data from these institutions were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA to assess the development of creative communication awareness and empathy.

3. Results

The research findings corresponding to the objectives are as follows:

3.1 Development of the Framework for Enhancing Awareness of Creative Communication and Empathy in the Thai Social Context

The researcher conducted a review of literature, principles, theories, and related studies on awareness, creative communication, and empathy. The synthesized findings are as follows:

Synthesis of Awareness

Awareness refers to the expression of a conscious state or mindfulness. According to Gafoor (2012), it involves knowledge and concepts related to a subject (Burkhard, 2017), including the perception of stimuli, understanding of the subject, and evaluation before action (Vaneechoutte, 2000). Based on this synthesis, the researcher identified the following steps for the framework:

- Perceiving the Situation: Recognizing situations occurring in the surroundings.
- Understanding the Fact: Comprehending situations based on reality.
- Evaluating: Assessing received messages in terms of appropriateness and suitability.

Synthesis of Creative Communication

Creative communication involves exchanging information between two parties (Denis McQuail, 2010) and is considered a collaborative skill (World Economic Forum, 2015, p. 3). Successful creative communication is characterized by ethical practices and the avoidance of conflict (Aud Berggraf Sæbø et al., 2007; Henriksen et al., 2015).

Synthesis of Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, envision oneself in their situation, and take actions that alleviate their suffering without causing pain or distress (Hoffman, 2000; Windahl et al., 2009; Krzesni, 2015). This concept was integrated with creative communication to form the following steps in the framework:

- Thinking for Communication: Considering the approach to communication.
- Switching, if I were you If I Were You: Reflecting on how the recipient might feel about the communication.
- Showing the Communication: Expressing communication after thorough evaluation and

- consideration of its impact on the audience.

The synthesized data were used to develop a framework for enhancing awareness of creative communication and empathy in the Thai social context. The framework's quality was validated through expert seminars, achieving the highest quality rating (Mean = 5.00, S.D. = 0.00).

The developed framework, named "PUETSS," consists of six steps: 1) Perceiving the Situation, 2) Understanding the Fact, 3) Evaluating, 4) Thinking for Communication, 5) Switching, If I Were You, and 6) Showing the Communication as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The framework for enhancing awareness of creative communication and empathy in the Thai social context

3.2 Results of Implementation and Dissemination

Table 1. Results of the development of students' awareness of creative communication in both the experimental and dissemination groups using the framework for enhancing awareness of creative communication and empathy in the Thai Social Context

| Experimental Group | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|-------|------|--------|------|
| Test1 | 29 | 80 | 33.03 | 7.14 | 321.37 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 29 | 80 | 42.21 | 5.11 | | |
| Test3 | 29 | 80 | 57.59 | 5.41 | | |
| Test4 | 29 | 80 | 62.97 | 3.02 | | |
| Test5 | 29 | 80 | 68.28 | 3.80 | | |
| Dissemination Group 1 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 30 | 80 | 29.66 | 6.72 | 402.69 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 30 | 80 | 35.60 | 4.78 | | |
| Test3 | 30 | 80 | 45.66 | 7.07 | | |
| Test4 | 30 | 80 | 60.93 | 3.59 | | |
| Test5 | 30 | 80 | 67.03 | 2.93 | | |
| Dissemination Group 2 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 32 | 80 | 28.65 | 7.93 | 392.57 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 32 | 80 | 37.34 | 6.30 | | |
| Test3 | 32 | 80 | 45.03 | 6.37 | | |
| Test4 | 32 | 80 | 61.09 | 4.71 | | |
| Test5 | 32 | 80 | 66.22 | 5.28 | | |
| Dissemination Group 3 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 25 | 80 | 29.12 | 7.59 | 447.05 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 25 | 80 | 33.92 | 4.36 | | |
| Test3 | 25 | 80 | 43.04 | 2.19 | | |
| Test4 | 25 | 80 | 61.16 | 2.76 | | |
| Test5 | 25 | 80 | 65.92 | 4.71 | | |
| Dissemination Group 4 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 29 | 80 | 29.17 | 7.29 | 316.12 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 29 | 80 | 37.24 | 4.64 | | |
| Test3 | 29 | 80 | 48.79 | 7.37 | | |
| Test4 | 29 | 80 | 62.24 | 3.78 | | |
| Test5 | 29 | 80 | 67.07 | 5.85 | | |

From Table 1, the results indicate that the development of students' awareness of creative communication, in both the experimental and dissemination groups, improved significantly across all five tests. The statistical analysis revealed significant differences at the 0.05 level, demonstrating a consistent increase in students' awareness of creative communication.

Table 2. Results of the development of students' empathy in both the experimental and dissemination groups using the framework for enhancing awareness of creative communication and empathy in the Thai Social Context

| Experimental Group | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|-------|------|--------|------|
| Test1 | 29 | 100 | 34.03 | 7.92 | 395.57 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 29 | 100 | 44.17 | 8.15 | | |
| Test3 | 29 | 100 | 56.37 | 7.75 | | |
| Test4 | 29 | 100 | 69.44 | 6.93 | | |
| Test5 | 29 | 100 | 85.06 | 6.52 | | |
| Dissemination Group 1 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 30 | 100 | 34.06 | 7.38 | 390.12 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 30 | 100 | 46.10 | 8.23 | | |
| Test3 | 30 | 100 | 62.30 | 5.79 | | |
| Test4 | 30 | 100 | 72.90 | 5.46 | | |
| Test5 | 30 | 100 | 82.36 | 5.55 | | |
| Dissemination Group 2 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 32 | 100 | 32.31 | 7.23 | 409.17 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 32 | 100 | 45.43 | 9.45 | | |
| Test3 | 32 | 100 | 60.68 | 7.35 | | |
| Test4 | 32 | 100 | 70.31 | 5.96 | | |
| Test5 | 32 | 100 | 78.28 | 4.93 | | |
| Dissemination Group 3 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test1 | 25 | 100 | 32.12 | 5.61 | 543.04 | 0.00 |
| Test2 | 25 | 100 | 46.92 | 8.48 | | |
| Test3 | 25 | 100 | 59.08 | 8.14 | | |
| Test4 | 25 | 100 | 68.84 | 7.43 | | |
| Test5 | 25 | 100 | 78.28 | 3.76 | | |
| Dissemination Group 4 | Sample Size | Full Score | Mean | SD | F | p |
| Test 1 | 29 | 100 | 31.34 | 7.11 | 548.01 | 0.00 |
| Test 2 | 29 | 100 | 44.76 | 8.64 | | |
| Test 3 | 29 | 100 | 57.45 | 8.81 | | |
| Test 4 | 29 | 100 | 67.62 | 9.03 | | |
| Test 5 | 29 | 100 | 78.41 | 5.06 | | |

From Table 2, the findings show that the development of students' empathy, in both the experimental and dissemination groups, improved significantly across all five tests. The statistical analysis confirmed significant differences at the 0.05 level, indicating a steady increase in students' empathy over time.

4. Discussion

4.1 Quality of the Framework for Enhancing Awareness of Creative Communication and Empathy in the Thai Social Context

The framework developed in this study for enhancing awareness of creative communication and empathy in the Thai social context was found to be of the highest quality. This is attributed to its systematic development based on principles, concepts, and theories related to awareness, communication, and empathy. The research employed a rigorous research and development (R&D) methodology, adhering to scientific processes, and ensuring the framework's quality. Numerous educational innovations developed using R&D have similarly achieved high-quality standards, such as coaching-based supervision models (Phumsaidorn and Julsuwan, 2024) and learning models integrating cultural heritage wisdom (Kruaunteerayut, Theerapong, & Phanchan, 2024, pp. 48–58).

The development of the framework was informed by direct insights from individuals experiencing issues related to teasing. By synthesizing relevant concepts, the framework effectively addresses these problems. The core steps in the framework draw on the notion of awareness, which emerges from stimulus perception, comprehension, and message evaluation, aligning with scholars' definitions (Vanechoutte, 2000; Gafoor, 2012; Burkhard, 2017).

Regarding creative communication, the synthesis of academic findings defined it as the successful exchange of information between parties that avoids conflict and adheres to ethical standards (Aud Berggraf Saebø, McCammon, & O'Farrell, 2007; World Economic Forum, 2015; McQuail, 2010; Henriksen, Mishra, & Mehta, 2015).

For empathy, the analysis concluded that it is the ability to recognize, understand, and share others' emotions, often leading to actions that alleviate pain and suffering without causing distress (Hoffman, 2000; Windahl et al.,

2009; Krzesni, 2015). This concept was incorporated into the framework to help address issues identified through experiences shared by individuals who had been teased. Their feedback emphasized the importance of thinking before speaking and considering others' feelings during communication.

Example responses include:

“When faced with teasing, I feel uncomfortable and lose confidence. I believe people should consider others' feelings instead of saying whatever they want and excusing it as ‘just kidding.’ Regardless of how close the relationship is, mutual respect is fundamental to humanity.”

(respondent 1)

“Hearing the words ‘just kidding’ makes me feel bad, especially when it comes from close friends. It feels like they are disregarding my feelings and putting the burden on me not to get upset. Respecting one another should be a priority because ‘people might forget what they said, but the listener never forgets.’”

(respondent 2)

Moreover, the framework developed by the researcher to promote awareness of creative communication and understanding of others in the Thai social context aligns with the universal issues surrounding jokes and teasing. In many societies, people often use phrases like “just kidding” without considering the potential impact or the feelings of others. This is reflected in Haugh's (2016) study, which explored the use of the phrase “just kidding” as a form of bullying and as an excuse to downplay harmful intent. The study found that analyzing emotional reactions to such humor is closely linked to the speaker's intentions, which are often tied to moral considerations. Through the analysis of teasing behaviors that involve bullying disguised as humor, two main forms were identified: jocular mockery and jocular pretense. These forms of teasing are typically expressed sequentially, such as making a seemingly unserious teasing remark, followed by laughter, and then reiterating the statement with a claim of “just kidding.” Such interactions highlight the importance of moral factors and the need to carefully consider interpersonal dynamics and the impacts of teasing. The study underscores that the phrase “just kidding” can indeed function as a mechanism for bullying.

Therefore, kidding should not be dismissed as trivial but rather recognized as a serious issue that educators and society must address thoughtfully.

4.2 Implementation and Dissemination of the Framework

The experimental and disseminated application of the framework revealed significant improvements in students' awareness of creative communication and empathy, as indicated by statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) across all tests. The data showed that development in both areas started at a low to moderate level during the first two tests and progressively increased to high and very high levels by the third test.

The findings suggest that both awareness and empathy can be developed, but this requires sustained practice and repeated reinforcement. Brief or one-time interventions are insufficient for fostering long-term improvements in these areas. These results align with previous studies, such as Boonyaprapun (2020), which demonstrated that self-awareness in undergraduate students improved significantly after participating in an eight-session program.

Similarly, empathy requires time for cultivation, as shown in Gholamzadeh et al. (2018), where nursing students who participated in an eight-hour empathy training program exhibited significant improvements in their empathy and attitudes toward elderly patients.

Empathy, as part of moral and ethical behavior, can be nurtured through structured activities. Krzesni (2015) summarized Hoffman's (2000) five methods for fostering empathy:

- 1) **Mimicry:** Automatic or experiential imitation.
- 2) **Classical Conditioning:** Associating feelings with past experiences.
- 3) **Direct Association:** Relating to others' situations based on similar personal experiences.
- 4) **Mediated Association:** Using linguistic or other mediums as stimuli.
- 5) **Role-taking or Perspective-taking:** Imagining oneself in another's position to understand their emotions.

These methods informed the framework's design, particularly the steps of **Thinking for Communication** and **Switching If I Were You**. These stages encourage learners to imagine themselves as message recipients, fostering greater sensitivity to the emotional impact of communication. This aligns with Wongkumsin's (2021) findings, which showed significant improvements in psychology students' empathy after group counseling programs.

5. Conclusion

The study, “*Kidding Story Not a Kidding*”: *The Development of Process Framework for Enhancing Awareness of Creative Communication and Empathy in the Thai Social Context*, provides valuable insights into how seemingly trivial teasing can harm others, leading to diminished self-confidence, bullying, and conflict. The findings emphasize that developing awareness of creative communication and empathy can help communicators speak thoughtfully, consider others’ feelings, and avoid causing emotional harm.

The experimental results demonstrate that awareness and empathy can be cultivated through repeated practice and time. Therefore, educators, parents, and learners should actively foster these traits to promote constructive communication, minimize conflict, and prevent emotional wounds. This effort may also contribute to mitigating bullying in educational settings and minimizing potential damage caused by seemingly harmless phrases such as “just kidding.”

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Competing interests

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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