

# The Application of CLIL Approach in EFL Writing Course Integrated with Ideological and Political Elements

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## Abstract

College EFL writing course is both humanistic and instrumental, thus it has an important educational function. The CLIL is an effective approach to optimize foreign language curriculum system and provides a new mode for integrating ideological and political contents into foreign language instruction. It facilitates the development of learners' language proficiency and think abilities. Therefore, the present study explored the feasibility of integrating ideological and political contents into College EFL writing curriculum under the guidance of CLIL approach, aiming to provide new perspectives for the reform of EFL writing curriculum.

**Keywords:** CLIL, EFL writing, college writing curriculum, ideological and political elements.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, with the rapid increase of China's comprehensive national strength and international influence, the new era has put forward higher expectations and requirements for college foreign language education. In this context, the present college English education which is language skills-centered has been unable to cultivate high quality talents with noble ethics for the global development of the nation in the future. To meet the needs of the times, college English education plays a critical role in promoting China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world. The integration of ideological and political contents as a main part into college English curriculum is helpful for students to continuously carry forward and inherit Chinese culture, strengthen their cultural confidence and improve cross-cultural competence.

College EFL writing course is both humanistic and instrumental, aiming at improving students' communicative abilities and language productive competence. The purpose of the course determines the important educational function of the course. Students' writing process is also a process of establishing a multi-dimensional value system. Therefore, College EFL writing course is significant in strengthening students' morality education which helps cultivate their correct

outlook on world, life and values. It is also an effective carrier to integrate ideological and political education into professional course. Through closely integrating language skill training, writing knowledge and ideological and political contents into the instruction process, students are guided to foster their linguistic competence, critical thinking competence, pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence from both local and global perspectives. Therefore, it can optimize the curriculum system to serve the development of the country and the society.

The shift to the new era calls for a large-scale reform in English writing instruction. The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a competence-based teaching approach, which has been widely grounded in European education systems. It situates language learning in the subject learning context, which involves authentic language engagement and meaningful interaction (Masuhara, cited in Tomlison, 2007:34). Thus, both language learning and subject knowledge learning are emphasized, and learners are guided to acquire the concrete knowledge through language instruction. The employment of CLIL approach in College EFL writing instruction meets the needs of the dual focus on both language and content that are promoted by the development of the society. It also enriches College EFL writing curriculum and bridges the gap between language training and subject

content. The CLIL approach is helpful for learners to improve their foreign language abilities in the process of using English to explore knowledge, to deepen their understanding of the core values and to promote their ideological and moral cultivation. Therefore, the concept of CLIL is an effective way to maximize the efficiency of foreign language learning and provides a new mode for the reform of English writing instruction.

## 2. Content Language Integrated Learning and 4Cs

Based on Hymes' Communicative Competence and Halliday's Functional Grammar, the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was developed. Then the application began in European countries in the 1980s and it achieved effective results. The most prominent feature of the CLIL approach is the integration of language and content and it claims that subject knowledge and foreign language learning interact and complement each

other as two inseparable dimensions and the two have equal status. CLIL aims to integrate language learning and subject contents in the same learning and teaching context (Marsh, 2002). The primary goal of CLIL is to promote learners' foreign language proficiency in a more efficient and productive way. Coyle (2007) believes that integration is a powerful instruction tool, which can not only fulfill the aims of subjects teaching but also promote foreign language learning as a medium and target. Learners' target language should be developed in real contexts with content situation which provides learners with a scenario similar to acquiring the first language. Subject knowledge is deeply grasped through frequent use of the target language from different angles, and simultaneously, learners are provided with more opportunities and more authentic materials to improve their target language proficiency level.

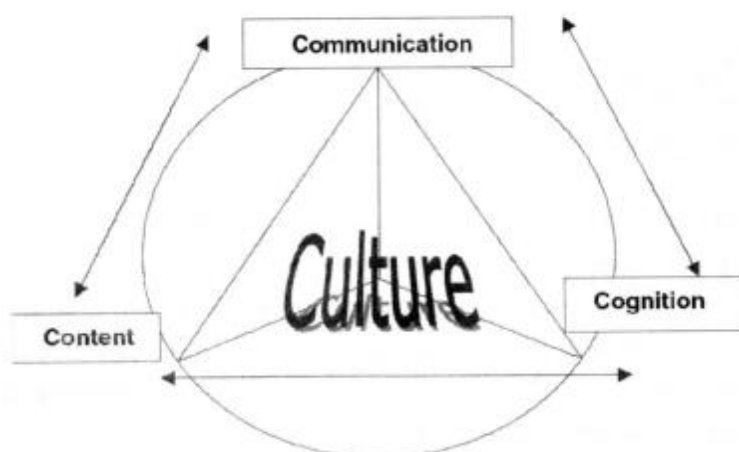


Fig.1: Coyle's 4Cs framework

The mode of CLIL integrates subject content and language learning through 4Cs framework (Coyle, 1999). In 4Cs curriculum, four aspects should be considered: content, cognition, communication and culture (Fig.1). Content refers to the subjects and topics in the course, ranging from professional disciplines to interdisciplinary subjects and understanding of relevant content. Communication is the language needed to use to acquire the knowledge and construct the content, such as language of learning, language for learning and language through learning. It includes all the languages, words, phrases, sentence structures and content-related linguistic forms, to make classroom learning happen. Cognition in the 4Cs framework means the cognitive level of learning and the thinking skills required by CLIL tasks related to the content that link the concept formation, understanding and use of language included in concrete and abstract ideas. Culture refers to the cross-cultural awareness that learners need to enhance when developing their multilingual abilities. The CLIL mode puts the cultivation of culture at the center of the framework. Through the exposure to multiple

perspectives that are closely related to the subject and the use of language, learners tend to develop shared understandings which help deepen their awareness of cultural identity and enhance tolerance of others. The four key interrelated aspects underpin the effectiveness of the CLIL mode in a particular context. Under this framework, learners can improve their academic abilities and expand professional development with the use of the target language. On the other hand, learners can enhance their target language proficiency to convey subject knowledge through the support of subject content and the enrichment of language resources.

The CLIL mode has become an important teaching concept in European countries in recent years. It has received more attention and a lot of schools are exploring and experimenting with the curriculum framework of CLIL. Sudhoff's study (2010) suggests that the CLIL can facilitate learners' development of cross-cultural communication and strengthen their learning motivation. From the perspective of ecological psychology, Jarvinen (2009) found that the CLIL model

could help learners interact with the content they have learned through their own dynamic cognitive mechanism to generate internalization and complete the learning process. Lee (2020) assessed CLIL curriculum on the writing performance of Korean EFL learners in high school. It shows that the comprehensive learning of subject content and language has a positive effect on participants' writing performance. Participants in the control group tend to use longer sentence structure, more complex and diverse vocabulary than those of non-CLIL group, which help improve their overall writing proficiency.

### 3. Research on the Application of CLIL Framework

The research on CLIL in China is still in its infancy. The existing research can roughly be divided into two categories: one is the introduction of CLIL theory, investigation and analysis of the feasibility of application in curriculum reform; the other is empirical studies of the improvement of learners' language proficiency level under the application of CLIL mode.

Lv Lianghuan (2001) analyses CLIL theory and emphasizes the guiding significance of it to foreign language teaching in which teachers should pay attention to both subject content and language learning. Liu and Chen (2011) propose that CLIL could be a new model for EFL teaching reform in China. Sun Youzhong (2017) highlights humanistic education as a new paradigm of college English curriculum. Its basic connotation is to integrate content knowledge into language learning which can effectively improve learners' language abilities, thinking abilities, cross-cultural competence and their humanistic quality.

On the other hand, researchers carried out empirical studies under the CLIL framework and gained positive feedback. Zhang and Li (2019) implemented the CLIL pedagogy in traditional intensive reading class. The findings indicate that the CLIL teaching mode can spur an integrated development of language, cognition and disciplinary abilities of participants. Hou Jing (2020) applied the 4Cs framework of CLIL in the context of intensive English reading course. It suggests that the introduction of subject content in class creates a real and meaningful context for language learning, thus promotes learners' deep processing of language and improves their communication competence. Guo and Wu's study (2013) suggests that the CLIL teaching mode provides real meaningful language input for learners and can effectively enhance learners' writing proficiency and their abilities in using the language. Cao and Li's study (2015) indicates that content-based language instruction is more effective than traditional ways of English teaching in stimulating learners' motivation. Huang Wei (2018) investigated the reform of College EFL writing curriculum under the guidance of CLIL mode from the perspectives of teaching concept, teaching content, information construction and evaluation system. In Zhong and Fan's study (2018), it

was found that CLIL model can effectively reduce participants' English writing anxiety and it has a more significant impact on the middle and low proficiency level learners. Chang Junyue *et al.*, (2020) conducted a series of curriculum reform measures under the CLIL pedagogy and found that the CLIL framework promoted the development of EFL learners' language skills, and also had a positive impact on their emotional attitudes.

In recent years, the CLIL teaching mode has gradually attracted wide attention in China. However, there are still some problems in the existing studies which are insufficient to provide effective guidance in teaching practice. Besides, there are few studies on the implementation of CLIL framework in English writing curriculum. Thus, the present study explores the feasibility of integrating ideological and political contents into College EFL writing curriculum, aiming to cultivate learners' humanistic quality as well as their language competence to provide new perspectives for the reform of EFL writing curriculum.

### 4. The Application of CLIL Framework in EFL Writing Curriculum Integrated with Ideological and Political Elements

Under the guidance of the CLIL framework, College EFL writing curriculum integrates the ideological and political elements into the existing teaching system and practice. This new teaching mode aims to help students to improve their English writing competence while instilling high moral values and cultivating active outlook on the world and life. The teaching procedure is conducted with the enlightenment the 4Cs of CLIL teaching framework.

Take one of the units as an example to illustrate this new mode of writing curriculum. In this unit, the topic is about different attitudes toward aging experience. The teaching objective is to guide students to learn to write a paragraph developed by examples, to understand the challenges faced by old people and to explore the meaning of a sense of mission for different groups of people.

Before the class, tasks are designed to build up context to improve students' cognitive level and cultivate their thinking abilities of the writing theme. Students have access to the micro-lecture integrated ideological and political ideas into the writing content on the online teaching platform unlocked by the teacher. Students are motivated to collect relevant ideas of the topic from online resources and then try to analyze the topic from multiple perspectives. At this pre-class stage, students are guided to raise their awareness of the topic through content knowledge construction, and they are also provided with a scaffold of content-area vocabulary for the writing task of this unit.

In the class, during the first period, students are encouraged to express their perspectives and understandings on the elderly and the aging experience based on the pre-class microlecture. Then through sample reading, the teacher guides the students to deconstruct the essay to analyze the general structure of an essay developed by examples and summarize the features of language use. Then, through teacher's instruction and discussion between teacher and students, the meaning of aging experience across cultures are further explored, and students gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by old people. In group discussion, students are expected to find more examples in both private life and public life in which people overcame obstacles and outwitted all infirmities by force of will. The teacher inspires the students to investigate the reasons why these people can demonstrate determined actions instead of their new challenges and to dig up the deep meaning of the text theme through highlighting the ideological and political contents—a strong sense of mission. The follow-up exercises including both language practice and writing skills are conducted in the ideological and political context designed by the teacher. Generally, at the first period of in-class stage, students are guided to think deeply to interpret the connotation of the subject content and enrich their language learning resources. In the second period of the class, the teacher gives the feedback on students' writing assignments and provides guidance on values related to the topic. Then the teacher provides rubrics for students to conduct the peer review. Students are required to give comments and suggestions on their partners' writings in content, organization, language use and ideological ideas. Peer review promotes discussion and exchange, students' critical thinking abilities are practiced, optimistic attitudes with firm ideals are cultivated and their cooperation abilities are trained.

After the class, students need to revise their writings based on teachers' feedback and students' comments. The process of analyzing and solving problems engages students in shifting their focus from "learning language" to "learning with language", enabling them to internalize the knowledge in both language learning and subject content. Also, the real problems in authentic context provide students with a broader vision and improved cognitive level, which enhance students' enthusiasm and self-confidence in writing in English and their practical language use abilities.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The teaching practice in the present study indicates the feasibility of integrating subject content into writing curriculum under the guidance of CLIL theory, which greatly increases the breadth and depth of writing course. The dual- focused writing instruction with 4Cs model can help solve the problem effectively that traditional teaching only focuses on language

competence and practice. To explore subject knowledge with foreign language can expose students to authentic language use and activate their motivation in language learning. The content of the subject provides a rich context and more opportunities for language learning and development, enabling students to acquire language in real communication, and ultimately improving their practical language skills. On the other hand, students tend to have a broader vision and improved cognitive level in seeking the content knowledge. In addition, this new mode of language curriculum is a good platform for integrating ideological and political ideas into writing instruction which helps cultivate university students' cross-cultural awareness promote their understandings of core values and arouse their patriotic feelings. Therefore, the CLIL framework significantly facilitates the synchronous development of learners' language and think abilities.

Some implications are presented to improve the efficiency of the EFL writing curriculum under the guidance of CLIL framework. First, teachers should not only have a good command of the target language but also possess sufficient knowledge on a certain subject, so as to achieve the goal of integrating language and content learning. However, it is a great challenge for a lot of English teachers to teach subject content in language class. One of the possible ways to improve the present situation is to encourage English teachers to cooperate with teachers of different disciplines to provide effective guidance for students. Additionally, the development of language and thinking abilities are inseparable in foreign language curriculum. Thus, language learning tasks should also be designed to facilitate students' all-round development and cultivation of their humanistic and ideological qualities.

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