

# Integrating the Teaching of Writing Skills and Values in an English-as-a-Second Language Classroom

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## Abstract

The main focus of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is to allow effective communication to occur so that the individual's balance of existence with their surroundings can be perceived. The paper explores the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teaching writing skills and values. The study uses the ancient indigenous text of the Meiteis (an ethnic group of Manipur in northeast India) called the *Puyas* as the content. The testing of the development of writing skills was done with the students of a school in Manipur using the content, a *Puya*, *Chain-rol*, and a conventional prose text prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur. The findings of the exploration showed that the use of the *Puyas* as content aided in enhancing writing skills and also helps in understanding values.

**Keywords:** CLIL; Indigenous content; *Puyas*; Values; Writing skills.

## Introduction

The main aim of education is to facilitate learners by enabling them to achieve a level of independence where logical decisions can be made in their lives which would help create an impact individually as well as the society. In language education, whether first or second, learning the subject matter is equally important as learning language. In education, the main aspect of teaching various subjects is to make the learners aware of the surrounding environment to bring about a balance in the human existence in the world. The awareness of the subject matter is brought about by the learning of the content. The main focus of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is to allow effective communication to occur

so that the individual's balance of existence with their surroundings can be perceived. Undeniably, the development of language skills can also be seen as part of incorporating content and language. The study explores the purviews of the theoretical and practical aspects of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to integrate the teaching of writing skills and values using the *Puyas*. The *Puyas* are the ancient written manuscripts of the Meiteis, an ethnic group of Manipur in Northeast India. The *Puyas* deal with diverse subjects such as religion, rituals, genealogy, medicine, code of warriors, migration, history, politics, geography, natural phenomena, astronomy, and so on. They were written in an ancient script called Meitei Mayek. The *Puyas*, till the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were anonymously written and undated. The invincible narrative of the *Puyas* captures the vital myth, oral traditions, religion, social, political, and historical aspects which include the representations of the oral cultures reminiscent of the Meiteis through the medium of folk culture and oral traditions like prose, songs, proverbs, maxims, and verses. The *Puya, Chainarol*, a literary prose narrative is used in the study to simultaneously teach writing skills and values.

## Literature Review

### *CLIL: A Theoretical Perspective*

CLIL is believed to be conducive to maximizing the language learning ability of the learners. It has a dual-focused teaching approach. CLIL is defined as a "dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 1). According to Dalton-Puffer, CLIL is defined as "educational settings where a language other than the students' mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction" (1). Therefore, in CLIL educational practice the curriculum subjects are taught and instructed through/ by a foreign/ second language. In the CLIL approach, the learner's problem-solving and cognitive skills are developed using language and the understanding of other disciplines is also developed (Gabillon, 2020). The *4Cs Framework for CLIL* (qtd. in Coyle, 2008 103) as put forth by Coyle (1999) are Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. Coyle elucidates that to incorporate content learning and language learning equally, the focus of the framework is on the content such as the subject matter, themes, etc., and to work on understanding the close interrelationship "between content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (thinking) and culture (awareness of self and 'otherness')" (Coyle, 1999, qtd. in Coyle, 2008 103). Thus, Coyle's 4Cs Framework contends that cre-

activity and critical thinking are required to acquire and learn the knowledge of the subject matter. The acquired language skills in the process are then used to disseminate the comprehended knowledge within the society and the environment. It is therefore evident that Coyle's 4Cs Framework fulfills the attempt of concurrent learning of language and content of CLIL. Moreover, CLIL has its base in the learning theory which believes that learning in a given context is influenced by social interaction, and in the learning, the process knowledge to be acquired is accomplished (Dalton-Puffer 8). The learners in the social interaction theory are assumed to gain their knowledge and skills when communications take place in the community. CLIL is influenced by Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory (8). This theory assumes that the learner's cognitive skills are developed in a social interaction environment (8). The interaction of the learner with their surrounding environment plays a pivotal role in developing and enhancing their cognitive skills (8).

Writing skill is a language skill that can be nurtured through continuous practice. Further, researches (Liubinienė 92) assert that the development of oral communication skills, listening skills, and writing skills are better among CLIL students. Relatedly, Lasagabaster (39) showed the benefits of CLIL on written competence by examining the written competence of foreign languages in CLIL contexts holistically. The foreign language competency was taken through an English test comprising grammar, listening, speaking, and writing (39). These findings were similar to the research of Ruiz de Zarobe (206). She uses a different design but the same method and her findings revealed that in terms of language use, vocabulary, and mechanics, the CLIL learners in the age group of 15 to 16-year-olds scored significantly higher than their non-CLIL counterparts (206). Relatedly, Jexenflicker and Dalton-Puffer use analytical complexity measures to examine the result of CLIL application on written competence (183). The study revealed that the progress made by the CLIL participants was more than the traditional EFL curriculum participants. In another research, it was observed that business writing developed more efficiently when CLIL was used (Alnoori 367). Relatedly, Gene et al. assert that in the CLIL approach, the incorporation of language and content tends to be more efficient while teaching writing skills (160). Conversely, Yumnam explored the use of indigenous text to teach vocabulary and values using the CLIL approach (214). She established that the student participants' learning of vocabulary and values increased to a certain level when the indigenous text was used (214). Therefore, given the above deliberations, it is seen that the application of the CLIL approach in language learning assisted in developing English language skills as well as enhancing vocabulary.

## Value-education

Values form an important component in the process of education. Value education as a process of education can mean inducing the learner's to do, feel, think, reflect, experience and question. As Seshadri in the *Journal of Value Education, January and July 2005* asserts, the goal of value education is not to uphold passively conforming values and to blindly adhere to values and ideals which are passed on but to promote an individual to reflect and think critically, to make a rational choice, to behave responsibly and to respect learner's autonomy (11). Relatedly, Seshadri (2005) observes, that value education is "education for 'becoming'" (12). This is explained as education's role to develop an individual's personality which can be moral, ethical, spiritual, social, intellectual, rational, artistic, and emotional (12). It is also concerned with the right attitude of an individual in choosing the pre-requisite values to make them a responsible human being and therefore, the education process employs the human sense to feel, know and do (12). From the above discussion, it is evident that to include values in education is to develop judicious critical thinking, encourage rational thinking, expand the horizon of imagination, to be able to exercise the resolve to take the right path and develop the personality of the individual holistically thereby enabling them to make the right decisions in their life.

Therefore, the role of education in the development and nurturing of values in an individual is enormous. As the child grows, they start acquiring knowledge and skills from the school and the surrounding environment. The culture and the values structured in the community become an inherent element in shaping the child into a responsible human being. Therefore, school education in the age group of 8 to 13 years is the conceptualisation stage wherein the learner starts opening their mental faculties to further develop their creative and critical thinking to augment the learning process. Relatedly, their writing skills need to be enhanced to express their creative mental faculties and ideas. The narratives of the *Puya, Chainarol*, reminiscence in values, culture, and traditions. The text may be used to teach values and writing skills in the schools of Manipur. The interaction of the learners in society and the environment plays a crucial part in the CLIL approach. In the process, the learner first uses language to interact with society. Thus, the social environment is essential for reinforcing their existing knowledge for effective learning of the language and content. Taking these aspects into consideration, it is believed that as the interaction in the environment assumes a crucial role in the learning of a language so the second language learning using the indigenous and local content can be greatly productive.

## **Methodology**

### **Objective**

The study aims to incorporate the teaching of writing skills and values using the *Puya, and Chainarol* in the upper primary schools of Manipur.

### **Research questions**

The study further will progress by addressing two pertinent research questions:

- How can the indigenous prose narrative, the *Puya, Chainarol* be used efficiently as content in ESL classrooms?
- What are the various prospects of preserving and upholding the traditions of values when the objective is emphasised on developing writing skills?

### **Conceptual framework**

The study designed conceptual frameworks which can be stated as:

- The development and understanding of content for learning writing skills.
- The integrative learning of content and writing skills will develop the creative and cognitive skills of the learners enhancing them with life skills thereby making them responsible human beings.

### **Study design**

The study employs pre-test and post-test methods. This is used to test the writing skills of the student participants. The pre-test method uses a conventional prose text of English as recommended by the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BSEM). In the post-test method, the *Puya, and Chainarol* was used. The exploration was done with the class VII student participants of a school in Imphal, Manipur. The students taken for the study are 145 in numbers. The number of teacher participants is 4. The objective of the writing tasks and activities in this study is to test the comprehension and presentation of knowledge and the understanding and application of the content. The tasks and activities are designed to make

the learners learn the writing skills and values with fun and enthusiasm. The first section tests the students' ability to understand the content. In the second section, they are tested on their capability for real-life applications.

The student participants are given writing tasks and exercises based on the discussion of the subject matter where they conceptualise their ideas using their cognitive skills and presenting in organised and grammatically correct sentences. Some of the tasks and activities when using *Chainarol* are:

1. group discussion: on themes, 'Values in Chainarol' and 'Significance of Values' and to write down the observations
2. group activity: investigate, write and discuss the different forms of Thang-Ta, a form of martial art of Manipur which has its origin in Chainarol
3. group activity: explore and write on the diverse folktales of Manipur which has implications of values in their narrations

The progress of the learning of writing skills and content of the students are assessed using criteria in a rubric form. Based on these assessment criteria, quantitative data were collected. At the end of each class conducted as a part of the study, the quantitative data in the form of scores are collected daily.

### **Research tools**

The following research tools were used to conduct the exploratory study:

- The conceptual framework
- The rubric

### **Findings**

#### **Implications of values in Chainarol**

The *Puya, Chainarol* (Way of the Warrior) is a literary work of many anonymous writers through different periods of history dating back to the first century A.D. to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D (ed. Irengbam 2012). It follows a historical narrative style with ethical values explicit in its narrations. It was written in an ancient script, Meitei Mayek, and ren-

dered into modern Manipuri and English. The study is carried out in the English translation of the text. *Chainarol* is the tradition of *chainaba*, a personal combat between two warriors who fights under a code of conduct institutionalized in the society. *Chainarol* chronicles 27 personal combats collected from real-life incidents. In one of the stories, the personal combat of the two warriors, Nongyai Chakha Moiremba and Heirem Kangbisu Athouba describes the intrinsic values discernible throughout the narrations. It also gives an account of the diverse and vibrant cult of heroism that was prevalent in the society of the time. While narrating the story, the values, culture, social, myth, history, and language of the time are discussed thereby contributing to a rich cultural heritage of existence in the history of Manipur.

The combats are governed by the sacred code of conduct institutionalised in the society. A *chainaba* usually takes place in the disputed place where the two warriors will mutually acquiesce. If one goes by the traditional laws laid down by the personal conduct of *chainaba*, Moiremba was the victor as he had injured Athouba in the fight. But Athouba had lied and told him that it was a leech bite. So, it was sheer injustice and was a violation of the laws of the personal combat laid down by the society of the time. In the subsequent combat, Athouba killed Moiremba. He won the combat by unfair means.

However, his inner psychological conflict consumed him to his death. The supernatural belief of the guardian spirits punishing the violator came true. The rational explanation which can be given is the moral lesson embedded in the story. The violator of the law was engulfed in a sea of culpable sorrow. Though victorious, Athouba was unable to fathom his win as he was torn by the thought of the verdict of the guardian spirits. This internal conflict was responsible for his mental agony and eventually his death bringing justice to the combat. The combat further showcases the triumph of righteousness. Thus, the narrative brings out a powerful ethical message embedded with cultural elements manifested in the combat of Moiremba and Athouba. The narratives abound in intrinsic human values like devotion to one's duties, peaceful agreements of conflicts, honouring the law, and the triumph of honesty and righteousness.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 explains the rubric used in the assessment of the writing skills of the students when the conventional prose and *Chainarol* were used.

**Table 1: Writing ability when the conventional prose and *Chainarol* were used**

Criteria of evaluation	Pre-test score (%) (Use of Conventional prose)	Post-test score (%) (Use of <i>Chainarol</i> )	Difference (%)
The student can do the writing exercises with accurate sentences exhibiting knowledge and understanding of the text	54	58	4
The student can apply the knowledge learned and can write in an organised form with accuracy based on the comprehension of the text	30.5	52.9	22.4

Table 1 illustrates that in both cases, content and language are concurrently learned. The first criterion tests the students' ability to understand the content. It has been observed that there is an increase in learning ability from 54% to 58%. Thus, there is an observance of a difference of 4% when *Chainarol* was used. This implies that language is learned based on understanding the content. In the second criterion, the evaluation of the students was done to test their capability in real-life applications. It has been found to increase from 30.5% when the conventional prose was used to 52.9% when *Chainarol* was used. So, there is a rise of 22.4% when *Chainarol* was used.

This implies the learners' increased use of the cognitive skills which provides them a platform to actively engage in real-life applications. In both cases, there is an increase in the improvement level of the learning of writing skills when *Chainarol* was used. The reason as entailed might be due to the use of the material which induces the learners to take part in a social interaction environment. This is an important feature of CLIL which emphasises that the social interaction in the surrounding environment provides a platform to develop the cognitive skills of the learner. Therefore, when using *Chainarol*, the development level of writing skills based on the application of the content and understanding of the content is higher compared to using conventional prose. The use of the indigenous prose text might have induced the students into enhancing their motivation level



thereby augmenting their writing skills.

Additionally, in the CLIL learning approach, Coyle's 4Cs Framework, it is asserted that acquiring knowledge of the subject requires creativity and critical thinking. Then the language skills acquired in this process are used to communicate the subject and the knowledge learned within the society, environment, and culture. The tasks and activities employed in the course of the study particularly the post-test greatly assisted in enhancing the cognitive skills of the students. This assists them to carry out the tasks and activities with interest and fun. Their creative skills and motivation are also enhanced in the process. Furthermore, the tasks and activities employed in the post-test also aided the students to enhance their understanding of the content and further helped them to apply the knowledge learned in real-life circumstances. They had fun in the learning process. The tasks and activities used in the post-test facilitated the students to use their cognitive skills and offer a social interaction platform to revisit their existing knowledge. In the group discussions based on the topics 'Values in *Chainarol*' and 'Significance of Values', the students actively participate in a form of conversation with their classmates to deliberate on the various aspects of values drawn from *Chainarol* and the importance of values in making a world a better place.

The written assignment based on the group discussions assists them in improving their writing skills. In the group activity, where they have to investigate, collect pictures, write and discuss the different forms of *Thang-Ta*, a martial art of Manipur which has its origin in *Chainarol*, the student participants investigated by a form of research from various sources. Further, in the group activity research and write on the diverse folktales of Manipur which has implications of values in their narrations; the student participants are motivated into exploring the various folktales and their discernable values. This activity made them explore, think and reflect on the vibrant cultural distinctiveness of Manipur. The diverse folktales of the different groups of people describe the rich values and cultural distinctions of the way of living and existence of the diverse communities settled in different parts of Manipur. This also helps in creating a platform where others' values and traditions are learned and understood. Further, this leads to a peaceful co-existence and solving of conflict among the various communities. In all these tasks and activities, writing skills are enhanced while learning the values. The group activities assisted in providing an opportunity for the students to create a socially active environment favourable to developing writing skills as has been highlighted by Vygotsky's socio-cognitive development theory. Therefore, the level of

integrative learning of the content as well as writing skills is found to be higher when *Chainarol* is used.

## Conclusion

The study exhibited that simultaneous learning of content and language takes place when using the conventional prose and the *Puya, Chainarol*. However, it indicates that the use of *Chainarol* not only enhances writing skills but also helps in a greater understanding of values. The tasks and activities used in the study greatly enhance the creativity and motivation of the learners. In the CLIL approach, as the social environment occupies a crucial role in the acquisition of a second language, the use of indigenous content in the study is established to be compelling. The research further stakes out the inference of the possibility of promoting and preserving the values and cultural implications of the *Puyas* by incorporating the teaching of values and writing skills. In sum, the study shows that integrating indigenous content in ESL classrooms using the CLIL approach can assist in preserving and promoting the indigenous values, culture, and traditions of every community as well as learning the target language.

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