



# Content and Language Integrated Learning in the Children's Literature Classroom to Enhance Soft Skills of Undergraduates at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University

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## Abstract

This research aimed to study the effects of implementing content and language integrated learning (or CLIL) in the children's literature classroom to enhance soft skills of undergraduates at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. The research employed a qualitative research design. The population consisted of 3<sup>rd</sup> year English majors who enrolled in the Children's Literature course in the first semester of the academic year 2023, totaling 62 students. The sample group was selected through purposive random sampling, comprising 30 students from two classrooms. The research instruments included a CLIL-based lesson plan, an observation, student works, and a semi-structured interview. Three experts validated all instruments, ensuring an IOC of 0.50. Findings indicate that CLIL integration into the children's literature classroom can potentially enhance soft skills. Evidence from student behaviors, such as reading aloud, engaging in ceramic craftwork, and creating board games, demonstrated the effective practice of these skills in classroom interactions. From the interview, the top five soft skills students believed were developed from their studies were collaboration and teamwork, positive attitude, creative thinking, time management, and lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** Content and Language Integrated Learning, Children's literature classroom, Soft skills

## การบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในห้องเรียนวรรณกรรมสำหรับเด็กเพื่อเสริมทักษะซอฟต์แวร์สก็ล ของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลของการบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในห้องเรียนวรรณคดีสำหรับเด็กเพื่อเสริมทักษะซอฟต์แวร์สก็ล ของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย งานวิจัยเป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ กลุ่มประชากร คือ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 3 สาขาภาษาอังกฤษ ที่เรียนวิชาวรรณกรรมสำหรับเด็กภาคเรียนที่ 1 ปีการศึกษา 2566 จำนวน 62 คน เลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างโดยการสุ่มแบบเจาะจง จำนวน 30 คน เครื่องมือ ได้แก่ แผนการสอน การสังเกต ผลงานของนักศึกษา และการสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้าง ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ จำนวน 3 ท่าน ได้ตรวจสอบเครื่องมือ เพื่อให้ดัชนีความสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ (IOC) ที่ 0.50 ผลการวิจัยแสดงว่าการบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษาในห้องเรียนวรรณคดีสำหรับเด็กสามารถเสริมสร้างทักษะซอฟต์แวร์สก็ลได้ในกิจกรรม เช่น การอ่านออกเสียง การปั้นเซรามิก และการสร้างบอร์ดเกม สะท้อนได้จากการมีส่วนร่วมในชั้นเรียนจากการสัมภาษณ์ทักษะซอฟต์แวร์สก็ลที่นักศึกษาเชื่อว่าได้พัฒนาจากการเรียนในรายวิชา 5 ดับแรก คือ การทำงานร่วมกัน ทักษะคิดเชิงบวก การคิดเชิงสร้างสรรค์ การบริหารเวลา และการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิต

**คำสำคัญ:** การบูรณาการเนื้อหาและภาษา, วรรณคดีสำหรับเด็ก, ทักษะซอฟต์แวร์สก็ล

### Introduction

Currently, the labor markets emphasizes the development of innovations and the need of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that underscore the use of higher-order thinking skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, leadership, and the use of information technology and computers. Higher education instructors have to change and shift their roles from the traditional teacher-centered

approach to a more student-centered one and adjust their teaching methods to active learning. This is a significant departure from the 20<sup>st</sup> century teaching paradigm.

This research primarily addresses on the lack of essential soft skills among English major Thai students at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. These issues are reflected in the feedback from several organizations and employers regarding student performance

during their internships that noted that students or graduates cannot perform the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills effectively. From the perspective of the business sector, soft skills are crucial for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. Businesses stress the importance of hands-on application to ensure that students can effectively utilize their knowledge (Hirun & Thongkam, 2021). Regarding Wattanabut (2021), the challenges and barriers to developing soft skills among Thai youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century stem from the transmission and development methods of teachers, lack of awareness, limited learning channels to nurture soft skills, and the youth's indifference towards self-improvement.

Given the problems mentioned, the researcher sees the need to change the mindset and approach in teaching by increasing opportunities for students to practice, aiming to develop the soft skills which are essential for learners to regularly practice, both inside and outside the classroom. The researcher is interested in implementing soft skills to design and create more supplementary activities for students, rather than relying solely on lectures. The subject of children's literature is content-based and uses language skills holistically, allowing for the evaluation of skill application, leading to analysis, and understanding of the real issues. The researcher adopts the theory of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a guideline for lesson design because CLIL is a dual-sided teaching approach and has gained popularity and interest among scholars in the field of language teaching over

the past decade, such as in EFL, ESL, TEFL, TESOL, EMI, and etc. Therefore, this research proposes a methodology for teaching in EFL within the context of literary subjects, aiming to enhance soft skills based on the strategic framework of research to elevate the quality of education at CRRU to produce the characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century undergraduates. The study uses the theory of CLIL, with activities emphasizing interactions and practical tasks that foster comprehensive soft skills development, such as communication skills, time management, adaptability, teamwork, analytical and critical thinking, decision-making, creativity, complex problem-solving, lifelong learning, negotiation, leadership, and a positive attitude. This integrated approach can be beneficial for enhancing teaching and learning methods. The approach offers tangible development pathways, which promotes self-directed learning, ensuring students can apply their knowledge in future job roles, aligning with the labor market demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the digital era.

From the above mentioned, the benefits of this study can be applied in educational settings, inform curriculum development, and contribute to the existing literature on CLIL and soft skills enhancement.

## Objective

The objective of this research was to study the effects of implementing content and language integrated learning in the children's literature classroom to enhance the soft skills of undergraduate students.

## Research Methodology

The research employed a qualitative research design, enabling a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants regarding the use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) activities in children's literature classrooms. The variables included the treatment variable, which is the teaching plan that implements CLIL activities in a children's literature classroom. The dependent variables are the learners' soft skills.

## Population

The population of this research consisted of 3<sup>rd</sup> year English major students who enrolled in the Children's Literature course in the first semester of the academic year 2023, totaling 62 students. The sample group was selected through purposive random sampling, comprising 30 students from two classrooms.

## Research Instruments

The research instruments were: 1) a children's literature lesson plan with the implementation of CLIL activities, 2) an observation form, 3) student works and 4) a semi-structured interview form with open-ended questions. All instruments were examined by three experts for the Index of Item Objectives Congruence (IOC) at 0.50.

### **Explained by adding,**

Children's Literature Lesson Plan with Implementation of CLIL Activities involved a lesson plan designed to integrate Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) activities into the teaching of children's literature. The

plan was tailored to facilitate the development of soft skills in the context of language learning.

An observation form was used to systematically record the behavior and interactions of students during the CLIL activities. This form helped in capturing real-time data on how students applied their soft skills in a classroom setting.

The works produced by students during the course of the study, such as assignments, projects, and other creative outputs, were collected as evidence of their engagement with the CLIL activities and the development of their soft skills.

Semi-Structured Interview Form with Open-Ended Questions consisted of a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from students about their experiences and perceptions of the CLIL activities and their impact on soft skill development."

## Data Collection

The data collection took place from July to September 2023, with the voluntary consent.

First, the researcher arranged the classroom according to a lesson plan that included five activities: reading aloud, storytelling, picture talk, ceramic activity, and board games. These activities were designed to actively engage students in practicing and developing essential soft skills, while also stimulating learning through practical experience. For each lesson, the researcher recorded observations using a specific

observation form, complemented by photographs and video recordings taken during activities. After that, in the last week, both individual and group interviews were arranged and documented in interview forms and captured using audio recording devices. Then, all the data—observations, student work, and interviews—were subsequently analyzed. Thematic topics were established to evaluate students' soft skills. The collected data were stored in Word and Excel files on a computer. Then, to ensure anonymity, personal information of the participants was coded numerically. The data were then analyzed, and the findings were subsequently summarized and reported.

### Data Analysis

For data analysis, the researcher established a framework and pinpointed areas of analysis in line with the research objective. The approach was grounded in the principles of content analysis, highlighting themes associated with the behavior's indicative of soft skill practice. Given that the research was a qualitative content analysis, data was

thematically categorized and divided into two types: manifest content, and latent content.

### Results

Findings indicate that CLIL integration into the children's literature classroom can potentially enhance soft skills. Evidence from observation implemented activities such as "The Cat in the Hat" ceramic craftwork and designing board games (related to the story Vessantara Jataka, Alice in Wonderland, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) demonstrated the effective practice of soft skills in the classroom. Below are two activity example that are implemented into the lesson for students to practice their soft skills.

#### 1. "The Cat in the Hat" Ceramic Craft Activity

Implementing "The Cat in the Hat" Ceramic Craft Activity, offered students a rich, hands-on experience that not only taught them the art of pottery as a lifelong learning pursuit but also nurtured essential soft skills valuable for their future perspectives

**Table 1** Soft-skills practice from "The Cat in the Hat" Ceramic Craft Activity

Soft-skills practice	How does the activity work on enhancing soft skills?
Creativity and Innovative Thinking	Working with ceramics inherently required student's creative thinking as they must envision a design, consider combinations, and even innovate when a design doesn't go as planned, connecting with the content of the story "The Cat in the Hat"
Problem-solving	During the ceramic crafting process, not everything always goes as expected. A piece might break, or the glazing might not give the desired effect. Students learned to troubleshoot and came up with solutions to these challenges.
Patience and Persistence	Ceramics cannot be rushed. They require time to mold, dry, and fire. Students learned the value of patience and the rewards of persistence through the multi-stage process.

**Table 1** Soft-skills practice from “The Cat in the Hat” Ceramic Craft Activity (cont.)

Soft-skills practice	How does the activity work on enhancing soft skills?
Communication Skills	When students work on their ceramic projects, they have to discuss designs, delegate tasks, and share resources with classmates. This fosters effective communication and listening skills for them.
Adaptability	Not all designs will come out as initially envisioned. Students learned to adapt their plans and sometimes even came up with better results than originally anticipated.
Time Management	Given the various stages in ceramic crafting, such as drying and firing, students learn to manage their time effectively to ensure the work progresses smoothly.
Emotional Intelligence	Crafting can be therapeutic. It allows for self-expression, and students can become more in tune with their emotions by translating them into their artwork. Moreover, they developed empathy when they appreciated the work of others.
Decision-Making	From choosing the type of clay to the design and colors of the glaze, students make numerous decisions in the ceramic crafting process. These choices helped in honing their decision-making skills.



**Figure 1** The Cat in the Hat” Ceramic

**2. Designing Board Games Activity**

By implementing the designing board games activity (related to the content of the story Vessantara Jataka, Alice in Wonderland,

and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory), it offered students a rich, hands-on experience that not only teaches them about the core elements of storytelling, character development, and plot dynamics, but also immersed them in the cultural, historical, and thematic nuances of these classic tales. This activity encouraged students to critically engage with the texts, fostering deeper comprehension and the ability to analyze literary elements. Additionally, by translating these stories into games, students enhance their creative thinking, collaborative skills, and linguistic proficiency, making literature both accessible and interactive in an innovative learning environment.

**Table 2** Soft-skills practice from Designing Board Games Activity

Soft-skills practice	How does the activity work on enhancing soft skills?
Creativity and Innovative Thinking	Working on this activity inherently requires creative thinking. Students must envision a design, consider combinations, and even innovate when a design doesn't go as planned, connecting with the content of the story they have learned from the class.
Critical Thinking and Strategy	Many board game designs require students to think several steps ahead, planning and strategizing their logistics. This cultivated a student's ability to think critically about situations and anticipate outcomes.
Problem-solving	During the designing process, not everything always goes as expected. Students learn to troubleshoot and come up with solutions to these challenges.
Patience and Persistence	Designing board games cannot be finished within a day. They require time to think, plan, create, and work together. Students learned the value of patience and the rewards of persistence through the multi-stage process.
Communication Skills	When students work on their board game projects, they must discuss designs, delegate tasks, and share resources within a team. This fostered effective communication and listening skills. Board games can bolster verbal communication skills.
Collaboration and Teamwork	Group projects in designing board games teach students how to work effectively as a team, respecting each member's input and contribution.
Time Management	Balancing the workload of their assignments across various courses requires meticulous planning and prioritization. Thus, collaborating with peers who have different availabilities adds another layer of complexity. Students learned to coordinate effectively to ensure that group work sessions are productive and that individual tasks are completed in a timely manner. This requires them to forecast potential challenges, set interim deadlines, and frequently reassess their progress.
Decision-Making	The process of designing board games provided students with a unique opportunity to enhance their decision-making skills. While working on the project, they'll encounter differing ideas and opinions among their group members. This setting acts as a real-world microcosm, forcing students to reconcile diverse perspectives and reach a consensus on the game's rules, design, and mechanics. When faced with conflicting ideas, students must weigh the merits of each suggestion, consider the overall goals of the project, and make informed choices that benefit the collective outcome.

Regarding the students' interview responses when asked about soft skills, most answers defined soft skills as social abilities or skills related to interacting with people. These included skills in communication, emotions, adaptability, problem-solving, and creativity. They are important skills for smoothly working with others, assisting in the development of other skills, managing various problems,

and coexisting with others in society. The eight soft skills that students mentioned and believed were developed from their classroom experiences are collaboration and teamwork, positive attitude, creative thinking, time management, lifelong learning, communication, decision-making, and analytical thinking. Students seemed to understand the concept of soft skills. Regarding the group work activity,



notably, many defaulted to speaking in Thai. However, their enthusiasm in explaining to the teacher was evident, and their laughter contributed to a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. Some students eagerly added more information when their peers struggled to explain.

## Discussion

Based on the research findings, there are three discussion points as follows.

### **1. Effectiveness of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) Approach**

CLIL can be an effective method to amplify opportunities for practicing soft skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Take, for instance, the “Designing Board Game” activity. Requiring students to work in groups, it naturally fosters collaboration, negotiation, and communication. When students are tasked with solving real-world problems, they are further encouraged to employ critical thinking, creativity, and decision-making skills. An integral part of this process is self-reflection. Encouraging students to reflect on their learning and assess their own progress in developing soft skills can be highly beneficial. Additionally, constructive feedback on language use and soft skill development, especially when complemented by peer reviews, can greatly promote self-awareness and reflection. By weaving these strategies into CLIL activities, students are better poised to develop essential soft skills. The findings of this research confirm the idea that CLIL can

effectively enhance opportunities for soft skills, a fact shown by the “The Cat in the Hat Ceramic Craft” and “Designing Board Game” activities. These findings echo Inwan & Charoensap (2021) discussion that activities are key to the teaching and learning process. They allow students to express themselves linguistically and apply their knowledge meaningfully. These activities emulate real-life situations, fostering a need and desire for communication, and promote collaboration, building positive classroom relationships for students. Additionally, the implementation in this research adhered to CLIL principles. The researcher wishes to emphasize that this implementation considered the 4Cs: Content, Cognition, Communication, and Culture, as highlighted by Khamngoen *et al.* (2020) as well. Thus, drawing from the research insights and the noted educational discussions, it's clear that CLIL offers a dynamic approach that holistically fosters in learning and the cultivation of indispensable soft skills, setting students on a path of comprehensive academic and professional growth.

### **2. Incorporating Children's Literature in Language Learning in a CLIL approach**

Incorporating children's literature into a CLIL approach for EFL university learners can be a dynamic and enriching approach to language teaching, but it requires thoughtful planning and execution to navigate the potential challenges and maximize benefits. For university learners who are non-native English speakers, children's literature can provide access to simpler vocabulary and sentence structures, making comprehension



easier and building confidence. Children's literature can be used for various activities, from vocabulary exercises to critical discussions about themes, plot, and character development. While the language may be simpler, university learners can be encouraged to delve deep into the underlying themes, symbolism, and moral lessons, promoting critical thinking and analytical skills as well. However, there are challenges to using children's literature in a CLIL Approach for EFL university learners as the students might initially perceive children's literature as being too childish, affecting their interest. Also, while children's literature is valuable, it might not cover certain linguistic structures or specialized vocabulary relevant to university-level discussions. It's crucial for the teacher to bridge the gap between the simplicity of children's literature and the academic expectations of university students, necessitating skillful teaching approaches. Some themes or scenarios in children's literature might be less relatable to older learners, making engagement challenging. Thus, the teacher should ensure that the materials and teaching methods suit the academic and linguistic needs of higher-level learners. There are many important ways in which soft skills relate to children's literature in language learning within a CLIL approach. First, children's literature often revolves around themes of friendship, family, love, loss, and moral dilemmas. Engaging with such stories can cultivate empathy in learners, helping them understand and connect with diverse characters and their emotions. This emotional connection not only

fosters language learning but also promotes emotional intelligence. Second, many stories from children's literature have deeper meanings, allegories, or moral lessons. Students can develop critical thinking skills by analyzing narratives, identifying underlying messages, or comparing stories from different cultures. When used in a classroom setting, children's literature can be a tool for group discussions, role plays, or collaborative projects. This promotes teamwork, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving. In terms of communication skills, engaging with children's literature provides ample opportunities for students to practice and enhance their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, all of which are vital communication skills. They can recount stories, express opinions, or even adapt narratives. Lastly, many children's stories involve characters facing dilemmas or challenges. Discussing these scenarios in a CLIL setting can enhance learners' problem-solving skills, as they consider solutions or alternative endings. After engaging with a story, learners can be encouraged to reflect on the story's themes, characters' decisions, or relate events to their own lives. This promotes self-awareness and personal reflection as well.

### **3. Importance of Soft Skills**

In the context of CLIL, where the emphasis is on both content and language learning, implementing soft skills development through children's literature learning becomes a holistic educational approach. It not only promotes linguistic proficiency but also ensures learners are emotionally, socially, and

culturally equipped to navigate the challenges of the real world, which is highly in demand in the perspective of the business sector, as soft skills are crucial for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace (Hirun & Thongkam, 2021).

The study's findings confirm that implementing CLIL activities in a children's literature classroom produced effective results at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. English major students experienced comprehensive soft skills development through both intentional and incidental learning experiences. These soft skills include communication, time management, adaptability, teamwork, analytical and critical thinking, decision-making, creativity, complex problem-solving, lifelong learning, negotiation, leadership, and maintaining a positive attitude. Consequently, this proposed research approach holds potential benefits for improving teaching and learning methods. The results align with the recommendations of Boochoa & Janyarat (2022), suggesting that educational institutions in Thailand should nurture specific skills in their graduates to meet the expectations of employers and university lecturers. The findings verify that students have been practicing essential skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, creative thinking, innovation, teamwork, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, and lifelong learning, as highlighted in their research. To conclude, the implementation of CLIL with children's literature in the classroom setting at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University offers an educational approach selection, enhancing soft skills development,

aligning closely with contemporary scholarly insights and industry demands.

## Conclusion

In the ever-evolving global landscape, there is a heightened emphasis on equipping learners not only with linguistic proficiency but also with the soft skills necessary for successful interpersonal interactions and professional endeavors. The research conducted at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University demonstrates the significant potential of integrating content and language learning, especially within the context of children's literature, to achieve this objective. Children's literature serves as a rich and varied repository of language and cultural nuances. By immersing undergraduates in narratives filled with emotion, moral dilemmas, and diverse contexts, we cultivate essential soft skills such as empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. While seemingly simplistic, the stories offer multifaceted opportunities for discussions, role-plays, and critical analyses, allowing learners to engage both cognitively and emotionally. The use of the CLIL approach in the children's literature classroom magnifies these benefits. By ensuring that students engage with content while simultaneously refining their linguistic abilities, we provide a holistic educational experience. This integration ensures that learning is contextual, meaningful, and directly translatable to real-world scenarios. In conclusion, this initiative at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University underscores the power of innovative pedagogical methods. Leveraging the

innate charm and depth of children's literature through the CLIL approach offers a promising path forward for institutions aiming to produce well-rounded individuals, proficient in English and equipped with the soft skills essential for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Recommendations

In terms of soft skills, future studies should consider exploring specific skills such as emotional intelligence, leadership qualities, or conflict resolution as they could provide more focused insights. Apart from student feedback, understanding educators' and peers' perceptions can offer a more holistic view of soft skill development. Also, as digital tools

become increasingly prominent in education, research can examine how technology can facilitate or hinder the development of soft skills in a CLIL setting. By focusing on these areas, future research can build upon the foundation established by current studies, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of soft skill development within the framework of CLIL in children's literature classrooms.

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