

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING THROUGH CLIL IN HISTORY-FOCUSED COURSES

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Abstract: The integration of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in history courses offers new opportunities and challenges for developing students' writing skills in English. History, as a content-rich and interpretation-driven subject, requires learners to engage in sophisticated academic writing that combines factual accuracy, critical thinking, and structured argumentation. This paper explores effective pedagogical strategies for teaching writing in CLIL-based history courses, focusing on the development of genre awareness, scaffolding techniques, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Drawing on recent research in language and content integration, the study emphasizes how well-designed instructional practices can enhance both historical understanding and academic literacy among EFL students.

Keywords: CLIL, history education, writing instruction, academic literacy, EFL, genre-based pedagogy, scaffolding strategies

Introduction

In recent years, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach has gained increasing attention in European and international educational systems, especially where English is taught as a foreign language. CLIL enables learners to acquire subject matter knowledge while simultaneously developing their language skills. In humanities subjects like history, this integration presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Writing in history requires more than linguistic accuracy; it involves constructing arguments, evaluating sources, and adopting a formal, evidence-based style that is specific to the discipline. The growing use of CLIL in history courses at secondary and tertiary levels has sparked interest in developing pedagogical frameworks that support students' academic writing skills. However, writing instruction in CLIL classrooms is often underdeveloped, with an overemphasis on reading and listening comprehension.

The role of writing in CLIL history courses

Academic writing in history is not only a tool for assessment but also a means of learning. Through writing, students synthesize information, reflect on historical perspectives, and build structured arguments. In a CLIL context, writing becomes more complex due to the dual cognitive load: students must process historical content while expressing it in a non-native language. If not addressed properly, this dual challenge can lead to surface-level learning and linguistically limited responses.

Genre-based pedagogy

One of the most effective strategies for teaching writing in CLIL history courses is genre-based pedagogy. This approach emphasizes the explicit teaching of text types commonly used in historical writing, such as explanatory texts, argumentative essays, and source-based analysis. By exposing students to model texts and breaking down the rhetorical

structure of these genres, teachers help learners understand both how and why historians write the way they do.

Genre-based teaching supports learners in recognizing how purpose, audience, and structure influence writing. For example, teaching students to write historical arguments involves guiding them through stages such as thesis development, evidence selection, and counter-argumentation. This process builds not only language competence but also deeper historical reasoning.

Scaffolding and language support

Effective writing instruction in CLIL classrooms relies heavily on scaffolding—providing structured support that gradually fades as students gain independence. In history courses, this may include sentence frames, vocabulary banks, timelines for planning, and guided writing templates. These tools allow students to focus on content without being overwhelmed by language demands.

Teachers can also design writing tasks that build incrementally from lower- to higher-order skills. For instance, initial activities might involve note-taking or summarizing short texts, which can later evolve into full essay writing. Peer feedback, drafting, and revision cycles further strengthen students' confidence and accuracy in both language and content.

Cross-curricular collaboration

CLIL writing instruction is most effective when it involves collaboration between subject teachers and language specialists. While history teachers have the content expertise, language instructors can offer insights into grammar, coherence, and academic conventions. Joint planning can lead to tasks that integrate disciplinary content with targeted language objectives, ensuring that students develop comprehensive writing skills.

This collaboration can also result in co-taught sessions or coordinated assignments that blend content instruction with writing practice. When students see writing as part of their subject learning, rather than a separate language task, they are more likely to engage meaningfully and improve holistically.

Fostering Critical Thinking through Writing

Writing in history is not merely about recalling dates and events—it demands interpretation, evaluation, and argument construction. Therefore, critical thinking must be embedded in writing tasks. Teachers should encourage students to question sources, compare perspectives, and draw connections between historical periods and current events.

Task design plays a crucial role here. Open-ended essay prompts, source analysis activities, and position papers require students to take a stance and defend it with evidence. These tasks align well with both historical thinking and language practice, offering rich opportunities for integrated skill development.

The role of writing in CLIL history courses

In CLIL-based history education, writing is a vital tool for demonstrating historical understanding and practicing academic discourse. However, learners in EFL settings often encounter dual challenges: understanding complex historical content and articulating ideas in a second language. This double demand increases cognitive load and may lead students to prioritize either content or language, neglecting the balance necessary for meaningful learning. Without structured writing instruction, students risk producing historically superficial or linguistically underdeveloped texts.

Writing in history also involves abstract thinking, cause-and-effect reasoning, and narrative construction. Therefore, developing these cognitive skills through language requires

deliberate teaching strategies that recognize both the subject matter and the linguistic scaffolding necessary to express it.

Genre-based pedagogy in historical writing

Genre-based pedagogy has emerged as a powerful framework in CLIL settings. It emphasizes the teaching of genre conventions—the socially agreed-upon ways of writing that meet disciplinary expectations. In history, typical genres include chronological narratives, compare-and-contrast essays, and document-based questions (DBQs).

A genre-based approach begins with deconstructing model texts. For example, learners analyze a well-written argumentative essay about the causes of a historical revolution, identifying the thesis statement, paragraph structure, topic sentences, and use of evidence. Teachers then guide students through joint text construction, where writing is modeled with class input, before students move to independent writing.

This gradual release of responsibility fosters confidence and comprehension. It also allows students to internalize the language structures needed to express historical arguments, such as modal verbs for evaluating evidence or time markers to sequence events logically.

Scaffolding strategies: building complexity step by step

Effective scaffolding breaks down writing into manageable stages, especially critical in history where learners must handle abstract reasoning and unfamiliar vocabulary. One method is the use of writing frames—structured templates that guide learners through essay components such as introduction, argument development, and conclusion.

For instance, when teaching students to write about the causes of World War I, a scaffolded task may begin with a brainstorming map, followed by sentence starters like “One significant cause of the war was...” or “This led to...”. Visual organizers like cause-effect chains or comparison charts help students structure their thoughts before writing.

Other scaffolding strategies include:

- ✓ Pre-teaching key vocabulary (e.g., "alliances," "imperialism," "mobilization")
- ✓ Sentence stems for analysis (“This source suggests that...” or “The consequence of this event was...”)
- ✓ Peer editing checklists focused on both content (historical accuracy) and form (grammar, coherence)

This approach allows learners to engage with complex ideas without being overwhelmed by the demands of academic writing in English.

Cross-curricular collaboration: bridging language and history

One of the persistent issues in CLIL history courses is the lack of coordination between content teachers and language educators. Content experts may lack training in language instruction, while language teachers might not be familiar with the disciplinary logic of history. Cross-curricular collaboration is key to overcoming this gap.

Joint planning sessions allow teachers to align language goals with content objectives. For example, when teaching the topic of the Cold War, the history teacher focuses on key concepts and debates, while the language teacher helps students express comparison, contrast, and evaluation through appropriate sentence structures.

Developing critical thinking through historical writing

Teaching writing in history also involves nurturing students’ critical thinking skills—an essential competency in both academic and civic life. In a CLIL context, this means creating writing tasks that go beyond description and encourage interpretation, comparison of sources, and engagement with multiple perspectives.

Tasks such as evaluating the reliability of primary sources, writing position papers on controversial events, or debating historical interpretations foster deeper cognitive engagement. For example, students might be asked to write an argumentative essay on whether the Industrial Revolution improved quality of life, using both historical texts and quantitative data.

In such assignments, students must:

- Formulate a clear argument (thesis statement)
- Use evidence from texts and sources
- Anticipate and refute counterarguments
- Conclude with a synthesis or reflection

Teachers can support this by explicitly teaching language for argumentation and critical evaluation—phrases such as “While some argue that...”, “However, the evidence shows...”, or “This perspective is limited because...”

These strategies not only improve writing but also help students participate in historical inquiry, strengthening their overall academic development.

Conclusion

Integrating writing instruction into CLIL history courses requires thoughtful pedagogy that aligns language learning with disciplinary goals. Through genre-based teaching, scaffolding strategies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a focus on critical thinking, educators can help students navigate the complexities of academic writing in a foreign language. Rather than viewing writing as a barrier, teachers and institutions should see it as a bridge between language acquisition and historical understanding. With the right strategies in place, CLIL can empower EFL learners to become confident writers and critical thinkers in both language and content

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