

# **CHAPTER 14:**

## **LOCAL IDENTITY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: BIOGRAPHY WRITING AS A CLIL-BASED PRACTICE**

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### **A. Introduction**

Incorporating local content into English language teaching has been shown to significantly enhance students' engagement, cultural awareness, and linguistic competence (Alakrash et al., 2021; Minh & Linh, 2022; Yan & Jing, 2023; Ratri et al., 2024; Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). In the context of Situbondo, East Java, I applied this approach in a Creative Writing course by inviting students to compose biographies of individuals from their community whom they believed deserved recognition. This task provided an opportunity for students to explore their cultural identity while practicing English writing in an authentic and meaningful way. This chapter aims to explain the pedagogical reasoning behind the activity, outline how it was implemented, and reflect on the outcomes and insights gained from the students' work.

The integration of local content in English instruction aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), as both approaches emphasize meaningful communication, contextualized learning, and the use of authentic materials that reflect learners' real-world experiences (Richards, 2006; Mehisto et al., 2008; Coyle et al., 2010). When students engage with topics rooted in their own lived experiences, their motivation increases, and they develop a stronger sense of ownership over their learning process (Donge, 2018; Madkur et al., 2021; Muthmainnah & Hasbi, 2022; Ndiang'ui et al., 2025). Writing biographies in English not only supports students' language development, particularly in areas such as narrative structure, grammar, and vocabulary, but also fosters critical thinking, research skills, and empathy. This approach is especially relevant for learners with limited exposure to English outside the classroom, as it provides a familiar context through which authentic language use can emerge.

## **B. Teaching Design**

The teaching of biography writing in my Creative Writing course was structured as a collaborative, project-based learning activity spanning four weeks. The project aimed to integrate local content into English writing instruction by having students work in groups to produce biographical texts about notable figures in Situbondo. The teaching design combined explicit instruction, guided practice,

and independent project work. It encouraged students to engage in meaningful language use while exploring their local cultural heritage. This writing project was organized into three key phases: project preparation, project implementation, and post-project activities.

### ***A. Project Preparation***

Students were divided into small groups, each consisting of three to four members. The project was scheduled to unfold over four main meetings, though additional time was provided for consultation and revision. During the first session, I introduced the concept of biographical writing, explained its structure, and discussed criteria for selecting a biographical subject. We explored the characteristics of effective biographies, focusing on elements such as background, achievements, contributions, and personal values. I provided sample texts of well-known public figures and facilitated writing activities based on those models. After analyzing these examples, students practiced creating outlines for potential biographies.

### ***B. Project Implementation***

Once students understood the genre, they moved into the project phase. The implementation phase spanned several meetings and focused on research, data collection, and writing. Each group followed a series of scaffolded steps:

1. In the initial stage, students identified and explored potential biography subjects from Situbondo. These included historical figures, cultural leaders, athletes, law enforcement officers, or anyone with significant contributions to the community at the local or national level.
2. In the following week, each group presented their chosen figure to the class, explaining why they selected that person. The presentation session encouraged peer feedback, with groups exchanging suggestions on angles to explore and information to include.
3. In the third week, students began collecting primary and secondary data. This included conducting interviews with the selected figure, their family members, or close colleagues. They also gathered supporting materials from archives, social media, or local publications to strengthen the biographical narrative.
4. During the next meeting, students shared their progress by presenting a summary of their data collection. They received further feedback from their peers and the instructor to refine the direction of their writing.
5. After the data presentation, students worked on drafting their biographies. They were encouraged to consult with me regularly for guidance on content development, language use, and structure.

### ***C. Post-Project Activities***

The final phase of the project focused on revision, reflection, and presentation with the following steps:

1. Once the first drafts were completed, each group submitted the drafts for review. They received both written and oral feedback, which they used to improve and polish their final versions.
2. In the final week, each group submitted their final draft and reflected on the process in a short group presentation. This closing session allowed them to showcase their work and discuss what they learned linguistically, collaboratively, and culturally through the project. In other words, each group shared their work to the class, highlighting not only the biography they had written but also their process, challenges, and what they had learned.

This teaching design fostered not only students' writing proficiency but also their critical thinking, teamwork, and research skills. Moreover, by documenting the lives of local heroes and community members, students contributed to preserving the cultural memory of Situbondo while practicing English in a meaningful context.

### **C. Further Discussion**

The integration of local content through a biography writing project in an English Creative Writing class proved to be an enriching learning experience. By inviting students

to research and write about real people from Situbondo, the project not only developed students' language skills but also strengthened their cultural awareness and connection to the community. Students engaged in meaningful writing tasks that required critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic communication. However, despite these benefits, the implementation process was not without its difficulties. This biography writing project can be done as long as possible challenges, like those in my students' project, are considered in advance:

1. Lack of interview preparation. Students were asked to conduct interviews with their chosen subjects, but they were not provided with adequate guidance on how to prepare interview questions. As a result, many students obtained incomplete or irrelevant data. Some groups included unnecessary personal details, while others failed to uncover meaningful aspects of the subject's life due to vague questioning.
2. Unclear significance of selected subject. One group chose a person whose contributions to the Situbondo community were not yet clearly defined or significant. This made it difficult for the group to shape a compelling biography and eventually led them to change their subject midway through the project, causing delays and confusion.
3. Limited access to source material. A group selected a local hero who had passed away many years ago.

Unfortunately, the only information they could obtain was from the inscription on the hero's tombstone. The lack of available records or living sources limited the group's ability to develop a rich and informative narrative.

4. Duplicate subject selection. Two groups unknowingly selected the same person as the subject of their biographies. This overlap led to confusion and competition, particularly when both groups reached the writing and presentation stages.

Based on the potential challenges that emerged, here are some solutions I would recommend in case similar problems arise.

1. To address the issue of poor interview data, future projects should include a structured lesson or workshop on interview preparation. Students should learn how to write open-ended, relevant questions and how to conduct follow-up inquiries. Role-playing or sample interviews may also be used to build students' confidence before approaching their subjects.
2. To ensure students select subjects with meaningful and relevant contributions, an initial proposal and approval phase should be introduced. In this phase, each group will present their chosen figure along with a justification for the selection. This will allow the instructor to provide feedback early and help avoid weak or problematic subjects.

3. When students are drawn to write about historical figures, they should be encouraged to first evaluate the availability of primary and secondary sources. If resources are limited, students may need to choose more accessible subjects or broaden their scope to include community narratives that are better documented. The instructor can also offer a list of suggested subjects with known access points.
4. To prevent multiple groups from choosing the same subject, a subject registration process should be implemented. Each group will submit their selected figure for approval on a first-come, first-served basis. This system encourages variety and ensures more individuals from the community are recognized.

The integration of local content into English language instruction offers a range of benefits for learners (Hasbi et al., 2025). This approach not only boosts student engagement and motivation through relevant and meaningful materials but also enhances their communication skills and intercultural awareness. It aligns with the principles of CLIL, which emphasize language learning through authentic and context-rich content (Mehisto et al., 2008; Coyle et al., 2010). Additionally, the use of culture-based materials has been shown to build students' confidence and language skills, as it allows them to connect learning with their own lived experiences (Alakrash et al., 2021; Hasbi, 2025). By linking language learning to learners' local identities, ed-



ucators can foster an inclusive, motivating, and effective learning environment, the one that prepares students for global communication while maintaining their connection to their cultural roots.

### Author

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