

# Using Children's Literature to Teach the 4Cs of CLIL: A Systematic Review of EFL Studies

*Uso de la literatura infantil para enseñar las 4 C de AICLE: una revisión sistemática de los estudios de inglés como lengua extranjera*

*Uso da literatura infantil no ensino das 4 C de CLIL: uma revisão sistemática dos estudos de inglês como língua estrangeira*

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**ABSTRACT.** This systematic review examines whether the use of children's literature in EFL classrooms supports the 4Cs of CLIL—content, communication, cognition, and culture. Previous research has shown many benefits for using children's literature in English-dominant classroom settings, but it seems little attention has been given to its use in EFL contexts and no attention in CLIL. This study utilizes a systematic search strategy to collect and synthesize current research on children's literature use in EFL settings in order to better understand how children's literature may impact EFL student learning and, specifically, examine whether its use can meet the 4Cs of CLIL. Records from four databases were screened for studies using children's literature in EFL settings, resulting in the inclusion of 15 articles. The analysis of the articles reveals that current research shows evidence that the use of children's literature can help facilitate student learning in content, communication, cognition, and culture. However, despite this clear connection to the goals of CLIL, investigations on children's literature remain absent from CLIL research. We believe this research lends support for the use of children's literature in the CLIL classroom and calls for more attention, both by practitioners and researchers, toward the use of children's literature in CLIL classrooms.

**Keywords (Source: Unesco Thesaurus):** children's books; second language instruction; primary education; secondary education; curriculum.

**RESUMEN.** Esta revisión sistemática examina si el uso de la literatura infantil en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera es un apoyo para las 4 C de AICLE: contenido, comunicación, cognición y cultura. Previas investigaciones han mostrado muchos beneficios de usar la literatura infantil en contextos de clase en los que predomina el inglés, pero parece que se ha prestado poca atención a su uso en los contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera y ninguna atención en AICLE. Este estudio utiliza una estrategia de búsqueda sistemática para recopilar y sintetizar la investigación actual sobre el uso de la literatura infantil en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera con el fin de entender mejor cómo la literatura infantil puede afectar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera y, específicamente, examinar si su uso puede cumplir con las 4 C de AICLE. Se realizaron búsquedas en los registros de cuatro bases de datos de estudios que utilizaran literatura infantil en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera, lo que resultó en la inclusión de 15 artículos. El análisis de los artículos revela que la investigación actual muestra evidencia de que el uso de la literatura infantil puede ayudar a facilitar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes de contenido, comunicación, cognición y cultura. Sin embargo, a pesar de esta clara conexión con los objetivos de AICLE, las investigaciones sobre la literatura infantil siguen estando ausentes de la investigación sobre AICLE. Creemos que esta investigación apoya el uso de la literatura infantil en el aula AICLE y que exige más atención, tanto por parte de los profesionales como de los investigadores, al uso de la literatura infantil en las aulas AICLE.

**Palabras clave (Fuente: tesauo de la Unesco):** libros para niños; enseñanza en segunda lengua; educación primaria; educación secundaria; plan de estudios.

**RESUMO.** Esta revisão sistemática examina se o uso da literatura infantil nas aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira apoia os 4 C da CLIL: conteúdo, comunicação, cognição e cultura. Pesquisas anteriores mostraram muitos benefícios do uso de literatura infantil em contextos de sala de aula nos quais predomina o inglês, mas parece que pouca atenção foi dada ao seu uso em contextos de inglês como língua estrangeira e nenhuma atenção em CLIL. Este estudo usa uma estratégia de busca sistemática para coletar e sintetizar pesquisas atuais sobre o uso da literatura infantil em contextos de inglês como língua estrangeira, a fim de compreender melhor como a literatura infantil pode afetar o aprendizado dos estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira e, especificamente, examinar se a sua utilização pode cumprir com os 4 C da CLIL. Pesquisas foram feitas nos registros de quatro bases de dados em busca de estudos que utilizassem a literatura infantil em contextos de inglês como língua estrangeira, resultando na inclusão de 15 artigos. A análise dos artigos revela que pesquisas atuais mostram evidências de que o uso de literatura infantil pode ajudar a facilitar o aprendizado de conteúdo, comunicação, cognição e cultura pelos alunos. No entanto, apesar desta clara conexão com os objetivos da CLIL, a pesquisa sobre literatura infantil continua ausente da pesquisa sobre CLIL. Acreditamos que esta pesquisa apoia o uso da literatura infantil nas salas de aula CLIL e exige mais atenção, tanto por parte dos profissionais quanto dos pesquisadores, ao uso da literatura infantil nas aulas CLIL.

**Palavras-chave (Fonte: tesauo de la Unesco):** livros infantis; ensino em segunda língua; educação primária; ensino médio; plano de estudos.

## Introduction

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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a form of teaching targeting content and language outcomes in contexts where the language of instruction is not used by the majority, is becoming a popular method for teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) around the world (Brinton & Snow, 2017; Ellison, 2019). However, recent reviews have raised several concerns about CLIL in terms of academic and social outcomes. For one, CLIL far from guarantees superior learning outcomes for language and content when compared with more traditional forms of teaching (Graham et al., 2018). There are also concerns about the effect of CLIL on attitudes toward local languages and cultures (Graham & Eslami, 2019). Though teaching strategies and frameworks for simultaneously teaching language and content have been explored in order to mitigate these issues, it seems one type of material has been overlooked and under researched—the use of children’s literature.

Children’s literature, or books written specifically with a young audience in mind, has shown to be a promising solution for addressing many dimensions of learning in English-dominant contexts with English first language (EL1) learners (e.g., Hodges et al., 2018; McAndrew et al., 2017; Newstreet et al., 2019; Wasik et al., 2016) and English as a second language (ESL) learners (Fitton et al., 2018). Yet, in contrast to these English-dominant contexts, our search of the literature has revealed a lack of attention toward the use of children’s literature in CLIL classrooms. Though EL1 and ESL literature suggest children’s literature as a way to support the goals of CLIL known as the 4Cs—content, communication, cognition, and culture—it cannot be assumed that what works with students in English-dominant contexts will also work in CLIL contexts, where students typically have limited exposure to English outside of the classroom (i.e., EFL settings). In light of the absence of research on children’s literature use in CLIL and the gap in understanding of whether children’s literature can support the enhancement of CLIL outcomes, this systematic review examines the use of children’s literature from the broader scope of EFL research. The rationale for this approach is that, if the broader EFL research shows

evidence of development of the 4Cs in non-English dominant contexts, then a case can be made for increased attention toward children's literature use in CLIL research and practice.

## **Theoretical framework: 4Cs of CLIL and children's literature**

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CLIL has been implemented in classrooms around the world as an alternative to traditional language teaching (see Graham et al., 2018, for a review). The popularity of CLIL may be connected to its ability to address multiple learning outcomes simultaneously (Lightbown, 2014). Coyle et al. (2010) suggest that these multiple outcomes of CLIL should target 4Cs: content, communication, cognition, and culture. Content addresses the knowledge students should gain from a lesson, and communication could be connected to language outcomes. These two dimensions are explicit in CLIL's name and are the main goals of its implementation in most contexts. However, the 4Cs require that learning go beyond content and language and also address cognition and culture. Cognition encompasses higher-level thinking, such as the development of critical thinking skills, and culture "nurtures an appreciation of oneself and the potential for understanding and appreciating others" (Ellison, 2019, p. 249). Although there seems to be no research directly connecting the 4Cs of CLIL to children's literature, there is evidence that children's literature may be effective in addressing each of its four dimensions.

### **Content**

Children's literature has been shown to offer many opportunities to engage with content and build knowledge in a variety of subjects taught in English-dominant contexts, such as math (McAndrew et al., 2017; Furner, 2018; White, 2016) and science (McLean et al., 2015; Smolkin et al., 2009) among others. Trade books in the content areas offer a resource for explanations of content for students beyond those provided

by the teacher (Smolkin et al., 2009). These explanations in text allow students to take time to understand the concept and are written in a more approachable manner by providing access to higher-level vocabulary and concepts within a text structure that offers better support when compared with the dense language and structure of textbooks. Children's literature has also been found to be an effective gateway to scientific inquiry in classrooms (McLean et al., 2015), allowing for hands-on learning. Furthermore, Furner (2018) suggests that children's literature can be *bibliotherapy*, or a way to lower anxiety toward learning content material, by creating meaningful connections between stories and content. In sum, children's literature provides many low-stakes and motivating opportunities for students to learn and build upon knowledge in the content classroom.

### Communication

Children's literature "is a major source of novel language forms" (Colston & Kuiper, 2002, p. 36), and it is a prime source for developing language and communication skills. Shared book reading has been shown to be particularly effective for developing language skills of ESL students in the United States (see Fitton et al., 2018, for a meta-analysis), but it has also been shown to be effective with EL1 students. Through engaging with a variety of texts, students naturally develop various receptive and productive language skills. Many studies have shown that reading literature leads to vocabulary development (Wasik et al., 2016), a fundamental component of communicative ability. It has also been found that children's literature is a rich resource for metaphorical language which students may not encounter in everyday life (Colston & Kuiper, 2002). When teachers read to students and encourage them to make connections to literature, students' oral language abilities develop (Isbell et al., 2004; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Montag & MacDonald, 2015). Read-alouds can also serve as a model and help students develop reading prosody, which has been linked to reading fluency skills (Schwanenflugel et al., 2015). Overall, research has shown that students who have more exposure to text have better-developed communication skills and greater academic achievement (Mol & Bus, 2011).

## Cognition

The development of cognition, particularly in the form of critical thinking skills, has shown to be enhanced by children's literature. It has been found that engaging with children's literature "provide[s] opportunities for readers to compare and contrast information, elicit questions, analyze evidence, and make predictions" (Newstreet et al., 2019, p. 567). Reading can open the door to a critical examination of social justice issues such as race and religion where students learn to think about issues from multiple perspectives and challenge their biases (Möller, 2012; Newstreet et al., 2019). Children's literature, in the form of picture books, can provide a unique environment for critical thinking in that students have opportunities not only to critically examine text but in many cases can also draw inferences from the accompanying artwork. This can be especially beneficial for ESL students with limited English literacy skills (Martínez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011). When students draw their attention toward the aesthetic aspects of a book, there is often an increase in both comprehension and critical analysis (Pantaleo, 2017).

## Culture

Tunnell and Jacobs (2013) point out that characters from minority and foreign populations have become more prevalent in children's literature in recent decades. This increasingly inclusive nature of children's literature has allowed more students to see themselves through *mirrors*, peer through *windows* to view the lives of others, and even step through *sliding glass doors* to join new worlds and take on new perspectives (Bishop, 1990). The mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors presented by children's literature open up opportunities for students to view their own culture and engage with the culture of others. Mirrors can put students face to face with a character who faces similar challenges as them and can help show possible ways to overcome various obstacles that the child may not have previously thought of. Windows can give children opportunities to empathize with those with diverse ways of living and help the student consider their world from a different perspective (Hodges et al., 2018). Sliding glass doors invite the

student to join a global community and allow for cultural growth. The mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors “provide children and adults opportunities to address their fears and find connections to others in this world” (Möller, 2012, p. 33).

## The current study

As illustrated above, the goals of CLIL as conceptualized through the 4Cs and the growth opportunities provided to students through children’s literature seem to complement each other. However, our systematic search of the literature revealed almost no research on the use of children’s literature in the CLIL classroom in EFL contexts. In light of the dearth of literature on the use of children’s literature in CLIL, this systematic review will more broadly examine current research on the use of children’s literature in traditional EFL classrooms. The retrieved literature will be presented and discussed within the 4Cs framework in order to illustrate the potential of children’s literature to address the goals of CLIL. Specifically, this paper will address the following research question: How has children’s literature been used in EFL classrooms to develop content, communication, cognition, and cultural awareness?

## Method

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To explore the use of children’s literature in EFL classrooms, we utilized a systematic literature review process. In a systematic review, the goal is to “locate, appraise, and synthesize the best available evidence relating to a specific research question” (Boland et al., 2014, p. 3). Systematic literature reviews differ from general narrative literature reviews in that each step of the process is clearly defined in order to facilitate a comprehensive search and minimize bias (Campbell Collaboration, 2017). In the following sections, we will detail how our search was conducted, the process of screening and excluding articles, and how the studies were coded and analyzed.

## Literature search

Four electronic databases were used to conduct our search: ERIC for education, PsychINFO for psychology, Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA) for linguistics, and Web of Science to broaden the search beyond these disciplines. For Web of Science, "All Databases" was selected, rather than the default "Web of Science Core Collection." Prior to the search, the thesauri of the various databases were consulted in order to identify and refine search terms. Two clusters of terms were used in the search. The first cluster included terms associated with "children's literature," and the second cluster included terms related to "English as a Foreign Language." The search terms used in each cluster are as follows, connected with the Boolean operator OR:

**Cluster 1:** "child\* literature" OR "child\* book" OR "picture book\*" OR "wordless book\*" OR "read aloud"

**Cluster 2:** "English as a second language" OR "English as a foreign language" OR ESL OR EFL OR "English language learner\*"

The asterisk following some of the above search terms allows for various forms of a word to be searched (e.g., child, child's, children, etc.). Each of these clusters was placed in separate fields in the respective databases and the parameters for the field were set to search abstracts. However, Web of Science does not have an abstract parameter, so "topic" was used instead. The two fields were connected by the Boolean operator AND. The search was conducted in July 2019.

## Selection criteria and process

Prior to the search, criteria were set for the inclusion of articles in the systematic review. Articles were expected to meet the following criteria for inclusion:

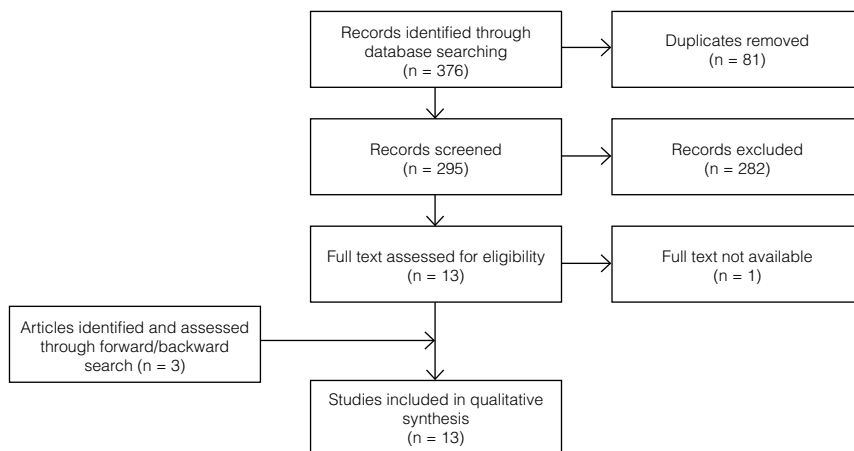
1. The reporting of the study is in English.
2. The study is empirical and has been peer reviewed.
3. The focus of the study is on the use of children's literature.



4. The context of the study is in an EFL context where English is not the first language of the majority of the population.
5. The study participants are pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students (i.e., no university students or adults).
6. The study's setting is in a classroom (i.e., not home use of literature).

The first criterion for studies written in English, while admittedly a major limitation of this review, is to account for the linguistic limitations of the authors. Second, we decided to focus on empirical and peer-reviewed articles as a measure of quality control for the review, thus excluding edited collections and conference proceedings which may not have the same rigor of peer review as academic journals. The third and fourth criteria are in order to ensure that included studies matched with the research questions being explored. Next, we limited our study to students in pre-K through grade 12. Likewise, while there is interesting work that has been done on the use of children's literature in homes, the goal of this systematic review is to examine its use in the classroom, thus any study not in a classroom was excluded.

Figure 1 illustrates the selection process. The first author conducted the search and screened the articles using the systematic literature review software Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016). A search of the four databases returned 376 records. Duplicate records ( $n = 81$ ) were identified and removed, leaving 295 records for screening. Of the 295, four were removed for reporting in a language other than English, 111 were removed for not being empirical and/or peer reviewed, 116 were not about children's literature, 35 were not in an EFL setting, 12 had a population outside of pre-K through grade 12, and four were not in a classroom setting. After this exclusion process, 13 records remained, and the full texts were retrieved. One record was requested through inter-library loan but was found to be irretrievable and, therefore, was excluded. With the 12 articles remaining, a forward search using Google Scholar and a backward search using the reference sections were conducted, and three additional articles were added for a total of 15 included articles.

**Figure 1. Article selection process**

Source: Own elaboration.

### Article coding and analysis

The 15 included articles were read, and notes were taken in a literature matrix created in Excel. The literature matrix contained various fields for author, year, title, publication name, one-sentence summary, theoretical framework, literature review, country, population, level of education, research type, research instruments, data analysis, results, discussion, and notes. Additionally, fields were created that corresponded to each of the 4Cs and an X was marked if the study touched on any of the dimensions, allowing for sorting and filtering by dimension. During the analysis process, the sorting and filtering features were used in order to be able to focus on specific dimensions and allow for connections between studies to be drawn. The literature matrix, along with any additional notes taken, was used in the synthesis of the studies that follow.

## Results

An overview of the included articles can be found in Table 1. Below we will report the characteristics of the included articles in terms of year, country, education level, and research type.

**Table 1.** Summary of included articles

Author(s)	Year	Country	Level	Type	C1	C2	C3	C4	Brief Summary
Abdelhalim	2015	Egypt	E	M	X	X			Examines use of children's literature to develop life skills and learning strategies
Al Darwish	2015	Kuwait	E	QL		X	X		Examines the use of children's literature by pre-service teachers
Albaladejo Albaladejo et al.	2018	Spain	PK	M		X			Examines the effect of stories and songs on EFL vocabulary growth
Birketveit & Rimmereide	2017	Norway	JH	M		X			Examines the effect of extensive reading on L2 writing development
Freire & Filho	2015	Brazil	E	QL		X		X	Examines the use of picture books with children for enactments
Hayik	2011	Israel	HS	QL			X	X	Examines the use of children's literature to explore conflict
Hayik	2015a	Israel	HS	QL			X	X	Examines the use of children's literature to foster religious tolerance
Hayik	2015b	Israel	HS	QL			X	X	Examines the use of children's literature to challenge gender positioning
Hayik	2016	Israel	HS	QL			X	X	Examines the use of children's literature to critique gender positioning

Author(s)	Year	Country	Level	Type	C1	C2	C3	C4	Brief Summary
Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro	2018	Spain	PK	QT		X			Examines the effect of picture books on EFL vocabulary acquisition
Lee	2016	Korea	E	M	X		X		Examines the relationship between identities, literacy learning, and children's literature
Lin	2014	Taiwan	E	QT			X		Examines the effect of a read aloud on EFL vocabulary development
Lugossy	2012	Hungary	E	QL			X		Examines students' spontaneous comments during a picture book read aloud
Rass & Holzman	2010	Israel	E	M	X	X			Examines the use of children's stories in an elementary EFL classroom
Yeom	2018	Korea	JH	QL			X	X	Examines the use of picture book strategies to improve critical thinking and writing

Note. PK = Pre-Kindergarten; E = Elementary; JH = Middle School/Junior High; HS = High School; QT = Quantitative; QL = Qualitative; M = Mixed; C1 = Content; C2 = Communication; C3 = Cognition; C4 = Culture

Source: Own elaboration.

## Year

A search of the electronic databases returned articles ranging from 1969 to present. However, only articles from 2010 to present met the inclusion criteria, suggesting that the use of children’s literature in EFL is a recent trend. As shown in Table 2, the year with the most publications on EFL children’s literature is 2015, which had five included articles, followed by 2018 with three articles. The rest of the years between 2010–2018 had one or two articles, but there were no published articles found for 2013.

**Table 2.** Number of included articles per year

2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
1	1	1	1	5	2	1	3

Source: Own elaboration.

## Country

Countries from East Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South America are represented in the included articles (Table 3). Two articles from South Korea and one from Taiwan represent East Asia. From Europe, two articles are from Spain and one from both Hungary and Norway, respectively. The Middle East has the most articles with five from Israel, one from Kuwait, and one from Egypt, though it should be noted that the four from Israel were by the same author using what seems to be the same student population. Finally, there was one article from Brazil in South America. Southeast Asia and Africa (not including Egypt) were not represented in the included articles.

**Table 3.** Number of articles per region

East Asia	Europe	Middle East	South America
3	4	7	1

Source: Own elaboration.

## Education level

Table 4 shows the distribution of articles by level of education. Elementary students were the most well-represented group in the included articles with seven studies. There were four studies with high school students, but all by the same author and the same students, and two studies with junior high school students. Somewhat unexpectedly, there were no studies on kindergarten classrooms, but there were two studies in pre-kindergarten classrooms.

**Table 4.** Number of articles per education level

Pre-Kindergarten	Elementary	Junior High	High School
2	7	2	4

Source: Own elaboration.

## Research type

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are all represented in the included articles (Table 5). The majority of studies ( $n = 8$ ) utilized a qualitative methodology. Many of these studies used observations or analyzed audio or video recorded classes. Document analysis of journals or student work also was used in many of the studies, and a few incorporated interviews. Five studies utilized a mixed methods methodology that included either a questionnaire or a pretest/posttest in addition to the qualitative techniques above. Only two studies used exclusively quantitative methods with data collected through skills-based tests.

**Table 5.** Number of articles per research type

Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed
2	8	5

Source: Own elaboration.

## Children's literature and the 4Cs

Having reported the general characteristics of the included studies, we will now discuss how research has shown children's literature in the EFL classroom as a way to develop the 4Cs: content, communication, cognition, and culture.

### Content

Given that all of these studies were in traditional EFL contexts that were not implementing CLIL, content received little attention in the included articles. The most direct example of the teaching and learning of content is in Abdelhalim (2015) where children's literature was used to develop life skills. The author emphasizes that EFL classrooms are places that can go beyond language teaching and teach life skills to young children as well. The research shows that the use of children's literature toward this aim was effective, evidenced particularly well by one quote from a student, "Oh, this is what I used to do, I have to stop it now" (Abdelhalim, 2015, p. 191).

Part of the effectiveness of children's literature for teaching content may be related to its motivating qualities and its ability to connect with learners (Abdelhalim, 2015; Lee, 2016; Rass & Holzman, 2010). However, its effectiveness is not guaranteed. When students do not make personal connections to the literature, comprehension of content can drop (Lee, 2016). Also, it is critical that teachers are trained in how to effectively use children's literature in their classrooms in order to maximize content comprehension (Rass & Holzman, 2010). Children's literature is not a panacea for content learning. However, when teachers are properly trained and students are able to personally engage with the stories, it could be a powerful tool in the EFL content classroom, as exhibited with the pre-service teachers specifically trained to use children's literature in the EFL classrooms described in Al Darwish (2015).

### Communication

A majority of the studies addressed the benefits that children's literature provides in terms of communication skills. One reason that children's literature can be powerful for language development is

that it often provides visual scaffolding and a model of English usage through the discussions it inspires (Yeom, 2018). The books give students opportunities to be exposed to new vocabulary and expressions that they can later incorporate in their own language (Freire & Filho, 2015). With teacher facilitation, students can also develop language learning strategies that can be used to develop their language abilities beyond sessions with children's literature (Abdelhalim, 2015).

The included studies address the development of language in vocabulary (Al Darwish, 2015; Albaladejo Albaladejo et al., 2018; Birketveit & Rimmereide, 2017; Freire & Filho, 2015; Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018; Lin, 2014), reading (Al Darwish, 2015), and writing (Al Darwish, 2015; Birketveit & Rimmereide, 2017; Yeom, 2018). Vocabulary has received the most attention in terms of language skills developed by children's literature in the EFL classroom. All studies show that vocabulary is positively influenced by children's literature, but the studies also provide some guidelines for choosing children's literature for vocabulary growth and report that some types of vocabulary are more easily acquired than others. The teachers in Rass and Holzman (2010) note that the success of children's literature in the classroom depends on the books chosen. Simpler texts have been found to encourage more vocabulary growth than more complex texts (Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018). Furthermore, communication does not always need to be in the foreign language to facilitate student gains; Lugossy (2012) shows that first language use during English children's literature discussion may be helpful for scaffolding and developing student vocabulary and skills.

In terms of vocabulary words, Birketveit and Rimmereide (2017) found that adverbials had better uptake than adjectives in their study, and Albaladejo Albaladejo et al. (2018) found that cognates had the best uptake in their study. Interestingly, Lin (2014) notes that the students studied showed growth on a picture vocabulary test but not on a first-language matching test, possibly suggesting that children's literature targets a specific type of vocabulary development.

Beyond vocabulary development, a few studies have addressed children's literature and its effect on EFL literacy. Al Darwish (2015) notes that, after repeated readings, students were able to read the shared stories on their own. The author also found that students began



to incorporate language learned from shared reading to construct simple sentences. In terms of written discourse, Birketveit and Rimmereide (2017) found that students exposed to children's literature produced longer texts that were better developed in terms of story elements.

### **Cognition**

Engaging with children's literature is often used to develop students beyond content and communication in order to develop higher cognitive skills (Al Darwish, 2015; Hayik, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Lee, 2016; Yeom, 2018). Through children's literature, EFL students were found to expand their thinking by going beyond surface-level comprehension to connecting stories to their lives and experiences (Al Darwish, 2015). Yeom's (2018) study showed that students reflected on pictures within the text, showing evidence of comprehension beyond that of words alone. The author observed students growing from "casual viewers to reflective interpreters" through children's literature (Yeom, 2018, p. 42). Both Hayik's (2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) and Lee's (2016) studies show that, through children's literature, students have the opportunity to learn to challenge their biases and take on the perspectives of others.

### **Culture**

In an ever-connected world, it is critical to be exposed to and understand the many different ways people live. As we move from a modern to a postmodern conception of diversity (Slattery, 2012), children's literature can invite students to consider the lives of those who are different from them. The work of Hayik (2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) showcases how children's literature can teach students about other cultures and challenge students to critique their own. Her studies focus on the use of children's literature with high school students in Israel who come from the minority Christian and Muslim populations. In this particular area, there is a lot of conflict between the two minority religious groups, as well as with the majority. Using books that address religious diversity (Hayik, 2015a) and books on group conflict (Hayik, 2011), the author challenges the students to consider their own religious culture, the religious culture of their counterparts, and the consequences of conflicts between the groups. These experiences with children's literature allowed students to challenge the status quo

in ways they had not done previously and encouraged them to actively promote social justice reform in their community.

Beyond religion, children's literature in the EFL classroom has also been used to address race (Freire & Filho, 2015) and gender issues (Freire & Filho, 2015; Hayik, 2015b, 2016). Freire and Filho (2015) observed that children's literature gave students opportunities to reflect on issues of race and sexual orientation and uninhibitedly respond and take stances on these issues in ways they may not have previously felt comfortable to in a classroom. Children's literature allowed students in Hayik (2015b, 2016) the opportunity to explore the way females were portrayed in fairy tales, challenge those portrayals, and even take action by writing to the author of a book to express concern about gender positioning.

However, like all of the other dimensions, Hayik (2016) notes that not all students were affected the same way during these social justice units. While some students took action to try to push forward social justice issues, the impact on others was minimal. As Lee (2016) notes, for students to benefit from experiences with children's literature, they have to take on a "transforming" identity where the student is open to making connections to their personal lives and then applying these connections to other contexts. Students who take on an identity of "appropriating," where tasks are done to please the teacher, or "resisting," where the student rejects opportunities to make connections, may not be able to develop the same cultural understanding through children's literature.

## Discussion

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This systematic literature review examined research on children's literature in the EFL classroom in relation to the 4Cs—content, communication, cognition, and culture (Coyle et al., 2010). Considering the lack of studies on children's literature use in CLIL classrooms in EFL contexts, the purpose of this broad review of EFL literature was to better understand how children's literature may play a role in meeting the goals in CLIL classrooms. Although none of the literature reviewed

actually took place in a CLIL classroom, the findings suggest that there is evidence that children's literature can meet the goals of CLIL as put forth by the 4Cs, thus making the case for future researcher and practitioner attention toward using children's literature in the CLIL classroom.

Much of the findings on children's literature in EFL mirror those of literature from English-dominant contexts. Though few studies in this review explored content learning, which is typically not a focus in traditional EFL classrooms as it is in CLIL, those that did showed children's literature to be a gateway to content (McLean et al., 2015) and a non-threatening way for students to connect content to their lives (Furner, 2018). However, the current literature in EFL contexts is lacking in various content areas such as math, science, and others. Given the growing trend of teaching subjects through English in EFL contexts through CLIL and English Medium Instruction (EMI) (Dearden, 2015), we believe more research is needed in this area.

Of the 4Cs, the dimension of communication has by far the most evidence showing the positive impact of children's literature. As in research in English-dominant contexts (Wasik et al., 2016), children's literature has been shown to facilitate vocabulary growth. Gains have also been shown for reading and writing. Though recent research from English-dominant contexts has shown children's literature to impact students' oral language abilities (Isbell et al., 2004; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Montag & MacDonald, 2015), this area seems underexplored in EFL contexts. Overall, it seems children's literature has the potential to provide gains in the communication domain for EFL students.

Many of the areas of cognition touched upon in research from English-dominant contexts, such as critically analyzing texts and pictures in order to draw connections and conclusions (Möller, 2012; Newstreet et al., 2019; Pantaleo, 2017), are also displayed in EFL contexts. Students were shown to be able to go beyond the text and make connections to their lives and the lives of others. However, cognition can encompass a host of reading skills such as predictions, inferencing, comparing and contrasting, among others (Newstreet et al., 2019). A direct measurement of the effect of children's literature on these various skills is lacking in the current literature. These skills are critical for literacy, especially in a foreign language, and should be explored further.

Finally, studies included in this review showed an effort to expose students to different cultures. Much like research from English-dominant contexts, children's literature in the EFL context invited students to consider different perspectives and make connections (Hodges et al., 2018; Möller, 2012). In the work of Hayik (2015a), children's literature provided a mirror to view and celebrate their own religion while at the same time a window to view and understand the religion of others around them. The students in Hayik (2011) were also provided a sliding glass door to enter a new future where the conflicts experienced daily in their community were resolved and a more peaceful life resumed. The research in this area for EFL contexts is limited but powerful in a world that is ever more connected and diverse. While it is easy for EFL classrooms to become consumed with the learning of language, the culture side is one that should not be ignored.

Overall, though the research on each of the 4Cs is limited, all have been addressed to date to a certain extent in EFL research, and all have shown children's literature as enhancing student learning in each of the dimensions. Given this, we wonder why there is no research on children's literature in the CLIL classroom. If the 4Cs represent the goals of CLIL and children's literature facilitates growth for all of these dimensions in EFL contexts, it would seem that children's literature and CLIL may be a perfect match. Yet, the literature remains silent. Given this, we believe future CLIL research and practice should involve the implementation of children's literature. Admittedly, this would require extensive training for CLIL teachers on choosing appropriate books and implementing effective teaching strategies for targeting each of the 4Cs. Though this may be a large undertaking, especially in light of the lack of training CLIL teachers currently receive (Lo, 2017), we believe that this investment will pay off in that children's literature could potentially address multiple curricular goals simultaneously, possibly remedying a key struggle of CLIL teachers (Cammarata, 2010).

### **Future research directions**

The articles included in this systematic review suggest that interest in children's literature in EFL classrooms is a newer trend, perhaps following the field's gravitation away from traditional grammar-based

practices toward more holistic, communicative ones. Though it is too early to tell, the last five years show a growing trend in research interest. While there appears to be a good sampling of different regions of the world, some regions, such as Southeast Asia and countries in Africa, are not represented in this study. Future research should look into the effects of children's literature in EFL and CLIL classrooms in these areas of the world.

It was somewhat surprising that there were no studies in kindergarten classrooms, yet there were studies in preschool. Kindergarten would seem to be a prime setting for implementing children's literature practices, particularly picture books and read-alouds. As the trend of learning languages at a young age continues to spread around the world, research should explore the impact of children's literature with young EFL and CLIL learners. At the same time, the work conducted at the junior high and high school levels provide interesting findings, particularly in terms of the domains of cognition and culture. More research at these levels may provide more evidence for the implementation of children's literature with older students.

Future research should also embrace a variety of research methodologies. Work using qualitative and mixed methodologies should be continued, and an increase in quantitative research methods should be undertaken. Quantitative work accounted for a small percentage of the studies, and the sample sizes were small, leaving questions about the power of the findings. All types of research methodologies have the potential to contribute to our knowledge base and should be continued.

### **Limitations**

While this systematic review possibly shows a positive connection between the 4Cs and children's literature in EFL contexts, a few limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. As previously mentioned, one major limitation is the exclusion of articles not in English. It should be acknowledged that there may be many articles reporting on classroom practices in other languages that have not been reviewed. Second, though we made efforts to retrieve all peer-reviewed articles on the topic through the use of major databases that are inclusive of the bulk of literature, these databases are limited by the

journals they index. Non-indexed journals may also have articles that were not incorporated in this review. Finally, we acknowledge that by only including peer-reviewed articles, though a widely-used method of quality control, we may also have caused valuable data to be omitted that may be present in edited editions or conference proceedings.

## Conclusion

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Using a systematic literature review method, this study examined current research on the use of children's literature to support growth in the 4Cs of CLIL in EFL contexts. Results show that children's literature in the EFL classroom positively influences growth in the dimensions of content, communication, cognition, and culture. However, despite this clear connection to the goals of CLIL, children's literature remains seemingly absent from CLIL research given that the systematic search identified no studies of CLIL classrooms. It is our hope that the findings of this systematic literature review present a case for the inclusion of children's literature in future CLIL research and practice. We believe that children's literature has the potential to enrich the lives of students around the world in all four domains and should be a component in every classroom, CLIL or otherwise, around the world.

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