Enhancing Real-world Language Skills through Clil: A Study on Language Mastery and Everyday Applications

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates how Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) enhances language proficiency and its practical application in professional, social and cultural contexts. The research aims to explore how CLIL impacts real-world language use by integrating subject-specific content with language learning. Using a mixed-methods approach involving 270 students, 12 educators and 3 curriculum developers across three educational institutions, data was gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Key findings indicate that CLIL significantly improves students' communication confidence, particularly in professional and social settings and fosters greater intercultural competence. Students reported higher confidence in using language in everyday situations, including formal communication and informal social

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interactions. However, challenges such as the need for enhanced teacher training and alignment of resources and curricula were also identified. These findings provide important insights for educators and policymakers by demonstrating the potential of CLIL to transform language education, making it more relevant and applicable to real-life contexts. With adequate support and resources, CLIL can enhance language proficiency and intercultural skills, equipping learners to thrive in diverse social and professional environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency plays a crucial role in how individuals interact, navigate and interpret everyday scenarios. The increasing integration of diverse content areas with language education has paved the way for innovative approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL is a pedagogical approach in which subjects are taught through a foreign language, enabling students to simultaneously develop content knowledge and language skills [1]. By exploring everyday scenarios through the lens of CLIL and language mastery, this study delves into how language skills acquired through CLIL practices influence daily life, from routine social interactions to complex problem-solving situations. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a significant educational strategy in multilingual and multicultural contexts. It offers a dual-focused approach to education where the learning of a non-native language occurs concurrently with the learning of subject content [2]. The approach is grounded in the belief that language learning is more effective and meaningful when combined with content that is relevant to the learner's life. CLIL promotes cognitive engagement by challenging students to think critically and creatively in a language that is not their first, fostering higher-order thinking skills applicable in a variety of everyday contexts [3]. By intertwining language and content learning, CLIL enables students to gain functional proficiency that extends beyond classroom walls. Students exposed to CLIL are not only learning a language but also applying it in contexts that simulate real-life situations. For example, a history lesson taught in English to non-native speakers encourages them to use the language actively in a way that mirrors everyday discussions and debates about historical events, societal changes, or cultural differences [4].

Language proficiency is often defined as the ability to use a language correctly and appropriately in various contexts, from formal communication to everyday conversations [5]. In everyday scenarios, language proficiency becomes a critical tool for navigating social interactions, accessing information, expressing needs and understanding the nuances of different cultural contexts. For example, individuals proficient in a second language can engage more confidently in workplace discussions, comprehend media in that language and build relationships across linguistic boundaries [6]. The application of language skills in everyday scenarios can be seen in simple situations such as ordering food in a restaurant, asking for directions, or participating in community activities. These situations require not only basic language knowledge but also the ability to comprehend cultural nuances and contextual cues. Proficiency in a language enables individuals to read between the lines, understand humor and respond appropriately to social and cultural norms [7]. CLIL enhances this proficiency by contextualizing language learning in a way that mirrors these everyday scenarios. For instance, a CLIL approach in a science class might involve students conducting experiments and presenting their findings in a second language. This process requires them to use technical vocabulary, describe processes and engage in collaborative discussions, all of which are skills transferable to everyday interactions, such as explaining a problem to a mechanic or discussing a health concern with a doctor [2].

Language mastery involves not just the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar but also the ability to use language effectively across diverse situations and contexts. CLIL promotes language mastery by embedding language learning within meaningful and engaging content. According to Coyle et al. [1], this method ensures that learners are exposed to language in context, allowing them to understand its practical

application in real-life situations. For example, a geography lesson taught through the medium of English provides learners with the terminology and language structures necessary to discuss climate change, natural disasters, or urban development — all topics relevant to everyday conversations and global citizenship. The CLIL approach encourages a holistic understanding of language, combining listening, speaking, reading and writing skills with content-specific knowledge. This integration allows learners to develop a nuanced understanding of how language operates within different contexts. As Meyer [3] notes, CLIL fosters the development of both Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS are everyday communication skills that are essential for social interaction, while CALP involves the ability to understand and express complex ideas in an academic context. Both types of proficiency are essential for navigating various everyday scenarios, from casual conversations with friends to professional meetings and academic discussions.

Everyday scenarios demand a combination of cognitive and linguistic skills, which are effectively nurtured through CLIL. For instance, in a multicultural workplace, employees frequently encounter scenarios where they need to negotiate, persuade, or collaborate with colleagues from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. CLIL-trained individuals are better equipped to handle these situations due to their experience in learning content through a foreign language, which inherently involves negotiation of meaning, clarification requests and adaptive communication strategies [8]. Everyday scenarios often require problem-solving abilities, critical thinking and adaptability. For example, a person may need to interpret medical instructions in a foreign language or adapt their communication style to fit the cultural context of a business meeting. The cognitive challenges posed by CLIL, such as understanding complex texts or expressing detailed arguments in a second language, mirror these real-life demands, thereby preparing individuals to respond more effectively [1]. Moreover, the experience of learning through CLIL can foster greater cultural awareness and sensitivity, which are invaluable in today's globalized world. Everyday interactions — whether in a local market or an international conference — often require a deep understanding of cultural norms and expectations. CLIL inherently involves exposure

to different cultures, perspectives and ways of thinking, which can enhance a learner's ability to navigate and adapt to diverse cultural scenarios [9].

Beyond individual language mastery, CLIL has broader social implications. It encourages social cohesion by promoting multilingualism and intercultural competence, essential skills in increasingly diverse societies [10]. By equipping learners with the ability to communicate across languages and cultures, CLIL fosters inclusive societies where individuals are better able to understand, appreciate and engage with others, regardless of linguistic or cultural background. This ability has significant ramifications for social integration, civic participation and community building [4]. CLIL's emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving in a second language prepares learners to tackle real-world challenges. These skills are increasingly necessary in a world where global issues such as climate change, economic inequality and social justice require collaborative and multilingual solutions [3]. Thus, the language proficiency and cognitive flexibility developed through CLIL can empower individuals to engage more fully and effectively in their local communities and on the global stage.

Recent research has continued to demonstrate the growing potential of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in enhancing both language proficiency and subject knowledge across diverse educational contexts. Studies by Dalton-Puffer and Smit [11] emphasize the importance of classroom discourse in facilitating the integration of language and content, while García Mayo and Hidalgo [12] highlight how interaction in CLIL classrooms fosters communicative competence and improves language acquisition. Furthermore, Pérez-Cañado's [13] systematic review of CLIL research reinforces the pedagogical benefits of this approach, particularly in its ability to support multilingual education. CLIL has also been shown to align with educational reforms in various contexts, such as Ibero-American settings (Escobar Urmeneta, 2019), where its implementation has contributed to broader curricular goals. Additionally, Nikula and Moore [14] argue that while CLIL presents unique opportunities for language learning in multilingual environments, it also comes with challenges, such as the need for specialized teacher training and resources. These recent findings suggest that CLIL is not only effective in promoting

language learning but also plays a critical role in developing intercultural competence and addressing the needs of diverse learners [15]. As educational systems evolve to meet the demands of globalization, the integration of CLIL into curricula offers a promising path forward for fostering both linguistic and cognitive development in students.

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) enhances practical language proficiency for real-world applications. By integrating language learning with content knowledge, CLIL fosters not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, problem-solving and intercultural communication skills, which are essential in today's multicultural and multilingual societies [1]. This research provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of CLIL in preparing learners to navigate diverse everyday scenarios, from social interactions to professional contexts [13]. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how innovative language education methods can meet the demands of a globalized world, advancing both personal and societal development.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1 Participants

The study involved participants from three educational institutions with established CLIL programs. These institutions included a diverse mix of educators, students and curriculum developers, providing a comprehensive overview of CLIL's impact across different academic environments.

2.2 Sample

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from each institution. The sample included educators who implemented CLIL in their classrooms, students from middle and high school levels and curriculum developers involved in program design.

2.3 Data Collection

Data was collected through a combination of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Classroom observations were used to document teaching practices, student engagement and the integration of language learning with subject content. Semi-structured interviews with educators, students and curriculum developers provided insights into their experiences and perceptions of CLIL. Focus group discussions further enriched the data by allowing participants to share collective experiences and challenges.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to the effectiveness of CLIL in enhancing language proficiency. Both qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions, as well as observational data, were used to triangulate findings and ensure reliability.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

I. To explore the impact of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on enhancing language proficiency in real-world contexts
II. To identify and analyze effective pedagogical strategies within CLIL that support both content learning and language mastery
III. To evaluate the experiences and perceptions of students, educators and curriculum developers regarding the implementation and effectiveness of CLIL.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Impact of CLIL on Enhancing Language Proficiency in Real-world Contexts

The first objective reveals that CLIL significantly improves language skills that are effectively applied in everyday situations. The study involved a sample of approximately 270 students from three educational institutions with established CLIL programs in subjects such as science, history and mathematics. Data was collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Classroom observations, guided by a structured checklist, showed that students engaged more actively and confidently in classroom activities, demonstrating improved language proficiency and the ability to use the target language in practical contexts. The integration of content learning with language use provided authentic settings for communication,

enhancing students' retention of vocabulary and understanding of complex language structures. Interviews with 12 educators and 15 students from each institution further indicated that CLIL's focus on meaningful communication over rote memorization enabled students to handle spontaneous conversations, express opinions and interact more effectively in both social and formal settings. Students reported increased confidence in using the target language outside the classroom, feeling better equipped to engage in diverse scenarios such as social interactions, professional communication and community activities. Focus group discussions with students reinforced these findings, revealing that the real-life relevance of CLIL topics made them more comfortable using the language in everyday situations, like shopping, traveling, or participating in community events. Also, students noted that learning through CLIL fostered greater cultural awareness and adaptability, enhancing their ability to navigate multicultural environments. Overall, the study finds that CLIL effectively enhances language proficiency in real-world contexts by providing meaningful opportunities for language use, building confidence and equipping learners with the skills necessary to communicate effectively in diverse everyday scenarios.

4.2 Application of Language Skills Acquired Through CLIL in Everyday Scenarios

The second objective reveals that the language skills developed through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are effectively applied by students in a wide range of real-life contexts, enhancing their ability to communicate and interact in diverse situations. Data collected from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of 270 students and 12 educators across three institutions shows that CLIL fosters practical language use beyond the classroom. The findings indicate that students who learn through CLIL can readily apply their language skills in everyday situations, such as casual social conversations, professional communication and community engagement. Classroom observations documented instances where students used subject-specific language confidently during peer discussions, group work and presentations, suggesting a strong transfer of these skills to informal settings, such as talking with friends, participating in extracurricular

activities, or traveling. Interviews with educators highlighted that students were able to utilize complex vocabulary, construct coherent arguments and understand nuanced language in various everyday contexts, demonstrating that the language learning achieved in CLIL is not restricted to academic environments but extends to real-world applications. Focus group discussions with students revealed that they often found themselves more adept at handling everyday scenarios, such as ordering food at a restaurant, asking for directions, or negotiating in multilingual settings, as a direct result of their CLIL experiences. Many students reported feeling more comfortable and spontaneous in their use of the target language, with increased confidence in speaking, listening and interacting in diverse cultural and social situations. This adaptability was attributed to CLIL's emphasis on learning language through meaningful, content-based contexts, which mirrors real-life communication needs. Overall, the findings show that the language skills acquired through CLIL are highly applicable in everyday scenarios, equipping learners with the linguistic and intercultural competence necessary to navigate a variety of real-world situations effectively.

4.3 Experiences and Perceptions of CLIL Implementation by Students, Educators and Curriculum Developers

The third objective reveals diverse insights into the perceived benefits, challenges and overall impact of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Data from semi-structured interviews with 12 educators, 15 students from each of the three institutions and 3 curriculum developers highlighted a generally positive reception of CLIL while also pointing out some areas for improvement.

- Educators' Perspectives- Educators expressed strong support for CLIL, noting that it promotes a more engaging and interactive learning environment. They observed that students are more motivated and actively participate in lessons, as CLIL integrates language learning with interesting content, making the language more relevant and meaningful. Many educators reported that students developed both language proficiency and subject knowledge simultaneously, which they felt was a significant advantage over traditional language teaching methods.

However, some educators also pointed out challenges, such as the need for additional training to effectively integrate CLIL into their teaching practices and the extra time required for lesson planning to align content with language objectives.

- Students' Experiences- Students largely perceived CLIL as a beneficial approach to learning. They appreciated the opportunity to learn a language in a context that felt practical and applicable to real-life situations. Many students reported increased confidence in using the target language, not only in the classroom but also in everyday scenarios, such as speaking with peers, participating in extracurricular activities, or engaging in community events. They found that the real-life context provided by CLIL made language learning more enjoyable and less intimidating. However, some students noted initial difficulties in adjusting to content being delivered in a non-native language, especially when the content was complex or abstract. Over time, however, they found that this challenge helped them develop better comprehension skills and adaptability.

- Curriculum Developers' Insights- Curriculum developers viewed CLIL as an innovative and forward-thinking approach that aligns well with the demands of a globalized world. They emphasized that CLIL not only supports language acquisition but also promotes critical thinking, creativity and intercultural competence. Developers highlighted the flexibility of CLIL, allowing for customization according to different educational contexts and learner needs. However, they also acknowledged certain challenges, such as the need for more comprehensive resources, support materials and professional development opportunities for teachers to fully embrace CLIL methodologies. They pointed out that for CLIL to be more effective, there should be better alignment between curriculum design, assessment practices and teacher training programs.

Overall, the experiences and perceptions of all stakeholders indicate that CLIL is regarded as an effective approach to language learning that enhances both linguistic and content knowledge. While students and educators generally find CLIL beneficial for real-world language use and academic achievement, they also recognize the need for additional support, resources and training to maximize its effectiveness. The findings suggest that while there are challenges in implementing CLIL, such as teacher preparedness and resource availability, the overall impact is positive, with CLIL being seen as a valuable pedagogical strategy for fostering language proficiency, intercultural skills and holistic learning.

Challenges in CLIL implementation: Despite the benefits of CLIL, educators and curriculum developers identified several key challenges that need to be addressed for its successful implementation:

- **Teacher training:** Educators reported a need for more comprehensive training programs. Many teachers felt underprepared to effectively integrate language and content learning in a seamless way. The dual focus of CLIL, which requires proficiency in both language and subject matter, was identified as a key difficulty. Enhanced professional development, including workshops and ongoing training, was suggested as a way to overcome this challenge.

- **Resources:** The shortage of CLIL-specific resources was another major challenge. Teachers noted the lack of textbooks, multimedia tools and assessment materials tailored to CLIL's integrated approach. Both educators and curriculum developers emphasized the need for resources that better align with CLIL's pedagogical goals, facilitating more effective teaching and learning.

- **Curriculum alignment:** Aligning CLIL with existing national and regional curricula was seen as a significant obstacle. Curriculum developers pointed out that traditional education systems are often not designed to support content-based language learning, making it difficult to implement CLIL on a wider scale. This misalignment limits the potential reach of CLIL and may require curriculum reform to ensure smoother integration.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of this study support the existing literature on the effectiveness of

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in enhancing language proficiency and its real-world application. Previous studies, such as those by Coyle, Hood, and Marsh [9], have demonstrated that CLIL not only improves students' language skills but also promotes a deeper understanding of subject content. Our findings are consistent with these studies, as students in CLIL programs showed greater language confidence and proficiency in professional, social, and cultural contexts. In line with Meyer [3], who highlighted the dual benefit of CLIL in promoting both linguistic and cognitive skills, this study found that students were able to transfer their language learning to practical, everyday situations. The integration of content and language learning helped students build vocabulary and communication skills that were directly applicable to their daily lives, reinforcing the real-world relevance of CLIL [16].

Challenges in CLIL implementation: the challenges identified in this study, such as the need for more comprehensive teacher training and the lack of resources, align with issues raised in earlier research [2,3]. These challenges underscore the complexity of implementing CLIL effectively, particularly in educational systems that are not designed to support content-based language learning. The need for specialized teaching materials and alignment with existing curricula were also highlighted by curriculum developers in this study, pointing to systemic barriers that need to be addressed for the widespread adoption of CLIL [17].

Implications for educators and policymakers: The practical implications of these findings are significant for educators and policymakers. First, the positive impact of CLIL on language proficiency and intercultural competence suggests that more schools and educational institutions should consider adopting this pedagogical approach. However, to ensure successful implementation, it is critical that adequate support is provided in the form of professional development for teachers and the creation of CLIL-specific resources. Policymakers must also work towards aligning curricula with CLIL objectives to enable smoother integration of this methodology into existing education systems.

Areas for future research: Future research should focus on several areas to further investigate the effectiveness and scalability of CLIL. First, more longitudinal studies are needed to understand the long-term impact of CLIL on language proficiency and content mastery. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and educational settings could provide valuable insights into how CLIL can be adapted to diverse learning environments. This is especially important as the global nature of education continues to evolve, and students are increasingly expected to develop both linguistic and cultural competence. Further research could also explore the impact of CLIL in non-traditional subjects beyond those like science and history, where it has been traditionally implemented. Examining how CLIL functions in vocational education, the arts, or STEM fields could help broaden its application and benefit a wider range of students. Additionally, studies focusing on the specific needs of teachers, including professional development and resource support, would help address the practical challenges identified in this study.

6. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The study demonstrates that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) significantly enhances language proficiency and supports the practical application of language skills in real-world contexts. The findings reveal that CLIL not only promotes greater engagement and motivation among students but also equips them with the ability to use language effectively in everyday situations, such as social interactions, professional communication and community engagement. Through the integration of content and language learning, CLIL provides authentic contexts for language use, fostering both linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. The study also highlights the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders, including students, educators and curriculum developers, who generally view CLIL as a beneficial and innovative approach to education. However, they also identify certain challenges, such as the need for more resources, teacher training and curriculum alignment, to optimize its implementation. Despite these challenges, the overall impact of CLIL is perceived as positive, contributing to improved language skills, critical thinking and adaptability among learners. The study underscores the effectiveness of CLIL in

enhancing language mastery and its relevance in diverse educational settings. It supports the idea that CLIL is a valuable pedagogical strategy for developing language proficiency and intercultural competence in an increasingly globalized world. The findings suggest that with appropriate support and resources, CLIL has the potential to transform language education by making it more meaningful, engaging and applicable to real-life contexts, ultimately preparing learners for successful communication and interaction in diverse social and cultural environments.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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