CLIL Implementation Challenges in Business English Course, Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract

  Content Integrated Language Learning (CLIL) was regarded as an innovative teaching approach in the early nineties, it is still viewed as such in academic institutions worldwide and in Albania as well. Characterized by its dual purpose, that is teaching both language and business concepts simultaneously, the use of CLIL in business English courses, helps to enhance the students' language skills while offering a deeper understanding of business-related topics preparing them for communicative situations they might encounter at workplace in their future job positions.

  This paper examines the use of the CLIL approach in teaching Business English courses to simultaneously promote language acquisition and subject knowledge. By means of a case study, questionnaires and interviews, the paper tries to shed light on the course instructors' understanding, experiences, best practices/strategies and challenges while employing CLIL in foreign language teaching at Agricultural University of Tirana, Albania.

  The qualitative study employed in this paper concludes that most language instructors encountered many challenges when implementing CLIL. While considering training in CLIL as paramount and difficult to access, they state that the lack of resources, challenges in assessment and students' motivation heavily impact on the course instructor's willingness to draw lesson plans in CLIL

Key words: Content Integrated Language Learning, ESP, FL.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into university curricula, particularly in disciplines such as Business English and Legal English, has been spurred by the demand for English proficiency following the Second World War. David Marsh introduced the term "Content and Language Integrated Learning" in 1994 to describe the scenario in which a foreign language is employed to instruct portions of subjects or subjects with a dual objective, i.e., the acquisition of both the content and the foreign language simultaneously. This approach involves the teaching of subject matter content through a foreign language. This method of learning has the potential to improve both language acquisition and subject-matter knowledge simultaneously (Marsh 1994). It has the potential to enhance students' communicative competence and provide them with the specialized language skills required by the global marketplace through its implementation in Business English programs at Albanian universities However, the successful implementation of CLIL necessitates the meticulous assessment of a variety of contextual factors. The objective of this study is to qualitatively investigate the unique obstacles that English lecturers at the Agricultural

University of Tirana face when utilizing CLIL to instruct students in Business English at the Economy and Agri-business faculty.

It provides their valuable insight and sheds lights on their experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, it attempts to explore the intersection of language acquisition and academic content delivery, thus revealing significant insights into pedagogical strategies, student engagement, and curriculum design. Through in-depth interviews with course lecturers, this research pinpoints key obstacles, offering implications for improved teaching practices and curriculum development and addresses the following research questions:

- What is the attitude of teachers toward CLIL implementation in ESP courses?
- What are the perceived challenges with CLIL teaching, according to teachers who use the approach?
- What are the perceived challenges with CLIL teaching, concerning learner confidence in language use according to teachers that use the approach?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

While CLIL models vary with the context, in substance, they are educational approaches in which subjects are taught in a foreign language, allowing students to learn both content and language simultaneously. This learning approach promotes the seamless integration of language skills and subject knowledge, facilitating a more holistic learning experience.

According to Swain's Output Hypothesis, language is best acquired through meaningful communication facilitates this by immersing students in subject matter while using the target language, promoting active engagement and deeper cognitive processing. Additionally, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning, through collaborative tasks that require students to communicate and negotiate meaning in English within business scenarios.

Below, the foundational elements of CLIL are described:

- Dual Focus: CLIL aims to simultaneously develop language skills and subject knowledge, so students learn to understand and use a second language while engaging with the subject matter.
- Integration: The importance lies in language learning and content learning integration, not treating them as separate entities.
- Communication: Language is considered a tool for communication due to active collaborative learning, students work together to explore content.
- Cognitive Processes: It promotes higher-order thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information in both the second language and the subject.
- Cultural Awareness: It includes elements of cultural learning, enabling students to gain insights into the culture associated with the language.
- Authenticity of materials: Tasks and materials are designed to reflect real-life situations and contexts, making learning more meaningful and relevant.
- Assessment: CLIL context involves assessing both language and content knowledge thus including formative assessments that help guide teaching and learning.

- Teacher Training and Preparedness: Effective CLIL implementation, requires lecturers to be proficient in content area and the target language both, along with the pedagogical strategies suited for this integrated approach.

2.2   Key principles

Coyle was the first who draw up a theoretical framework of four descriptors generally known as the 4 Cs, to support the inclusion of CLIL within the curriculum. (Coyle, 2005)

They are as follows:

- Content and Language Integrated approach highlights the correlation between content and language learning, where vocabulary and grammatical structures are contextualized within practical business scenarios and communication situations. The language instructor becomes coherent and thinks of content in terms of "what we want our students to learn, understand, and do", rather than focusing solely on language education while implementing the approach.
- Cognitive Demand approach encourages higher-order thinking and understanding, accepting challenges and reflecting on them, through tasks that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, in-depth analysis, and creativity, all these regarded as essential skills in the business world. Content is related to cognition or put in simpler words, to learning and thinking. The content should be examined for its linguistic demands to enable the learners to create their interpretation of content, as a result, thinking processes need to be analyzed in terms of their linguistic demands.
- Cultural Awareness is the principle of learning content through a foreign language that fosters cultural insight and understanding, considered essential for success in international business settings. Several factors may contribute to the integration of content and foreign language in the curriculum, such as the time allocated to the foreign language, the teacher competencies, or the interest shown by the educational institution itself. The relationship between cultures and languages presents a dynamic complex. Intercultural awareness is fundamental to CLIL and it lies at the heart of CLIL principles. (Coyle 2006)
- Communication as a principle in CLIL, makes the course instructor choose the language to be taught. It must be appropriate and serve the learning context. Communication infers that students must use BE in the communicative situations in which the language is presented. A distinction should be made between language learning, which most of the time is understood as vocabulary and grammatical progression, and language use which focuses on communication needs and learning demands.
- When implementing these principles, course instructors create a more dynamic and effective learning environment that supports both language and content acquisition.

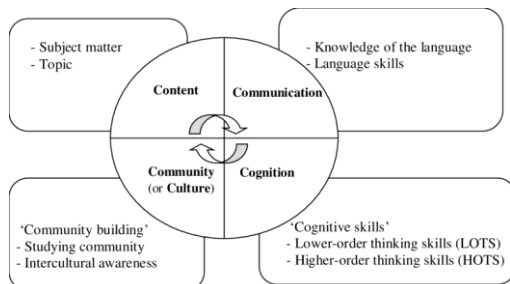Below there is an adapted visual representation of the principles.

Figure 1. The 4 C's of CLIL (adapted from Cope, Tommy. (2014).

2.3 Benefits and challenges in CLIL application

Several studies during the last three decades have emphasised the positive effects of the CLIL approach implementation towards linguistic improvement, including improved language proficiency, enhanced content understanding, increased cognitive skills, and improved intercultural awareness (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). A number of them found that CLIL urges learners' comprehension abilities or receptive skills to improve significantly more than their productive skills (Aguilar & Rodriguez, 2012; Dalton-Puffer, 2007). A plausible explanation might be the fact that receptive skills (i.e. vocabulary, and listening are more frequently practiced than productive skills (i.e. writing or speaking) during CLIL implementation as teaching approach (Coonan, 2007); (Ruiz de Zarobe, 2008). In addition, studies have found out that CLIL increases considerably other language skills, such as lexis (Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015), speaking (Admiraal, Westhoff, & de Bot, 2007), morpho-syntax (Lorenzo, Casal, & Moore, 2010), and writing (Pessoa, Miller, & Kaufer, 2014). Furthermore, there have also been found non-linguistic benefits to CLIL approach. For example, Dupuy (2000: 219) states that CLIL learners "show increased self-confidence in their ability to use the target language and express an interest in pursuing its study. It also helps learners to develop a 'can do' attitude towards language learning (Marsh, 2000). Therefore, CLIL is regarded as an impactful factor in upgrading learners' communicative skills in real-life situations and helping them interact interculturally efficiently. This advantage could put them in a higher position in the competitive global labor market.

However, teachers often face challenges, including curriculum design, resource availability adapting instructional strategies, balancing content and language goals, assessment and addressing diverse student needs (Harmer, 2007; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2013).

The Albanian context presents unique challenges, including:

- Limited exposure to English: Albanian students may have varying levels of English proficiency prior to entering university, potentially impacting their ability to engage with CLIL content.
- Teacher training and preparedness: Lack of adequate training in CLIL methodology and Business English specialization may hamper lecturers' ability to effectively implement the approach.
- Resource limitations: Access to appropriate CLIL materials, technology, and support infrastructure may be limited in Albanian universities.

- Assessment challenges: Designing assessments that accurately evaluate both language proficiency and content knowledge within a CLIL framework requires careful consideration.
- Cultural factors: Attitudes towards language learning and the integration of CLIL within the existing educational system may pose additional challenges

3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine characteristics of how CLIL is applied in the Agricultural University of Tirana, and the Tirana University in Albania, as well as to find out how teachers applying this method view learner engagement and confidence in language use in their students. The semi-structured interview used in this study, enables both the respondent and the interviewer to be active and be able to influence the interview. It is also possible for the interviewer to ask for clarifications and for further examples if anything is unclear. To ensure that we took note of all-important input, we recorded the interviews. The interviews were transcribed, and the answers categorized on a high level to give the basis for the analysis. Hornberger (2006) describes how the credibility of the research can be established by consulting participants during analysis, and our participants were positive to clarify and describe in cases where interpretations of the results were not clear. The participants in the study are ten lecturers of English for Specific Purposes at the Agricultural University of Tirana, Faculty of Economy and Agribusiness, and the University of Tirana, Faculty of Natural Sciences. In terms of degrees; two of them hold the associated professor, five hold the Doctor degree and three are Master of Science Graduates. They all come from foreign Languages education and background. The subjects that the participants teach include Business English, English for Food Technology, English for students of Informatics, English for Veterinary Medicine, and English for Agriculture and Environment. The subject is taught during the first academic year of Bachelor studies at the Agricultural University and all three academic years of Bachelor studies at Tirana University. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Interviews were conducted in English and Albanian (as needed) and audio-recorded with informed consent. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Document analysis of curricula, syllabi, and teaching materials was also conducted to supplement interview data.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 The application of CLIL in the classroom

This analysis section provides answers to the first research question, "How CLIL is applied in classrooms." The section is divided according to the aspects we aimed to investigate.

Subjects suitable for language integration. Overall, the teachers interviewed answered several questions similarly, but a few differences were noted. When asked which subjects are suitable to integrate into language teaching, the participants agreed teaching Business English provides extensive possibilities for language integration and language development, many topics are where you can do many activities that are language-based.] One of the participants also pointed out that topics such as writing a

resume, and job interviews can be good starting points, since those subjects provide support for the learners by using international symbols, which can take the pressure away from the language use initially.

Challenges in Curriculum Design Resource Availability. Teachers reported difficulties in designing an effective curriculum that balances language learning objectives with subject-specific content. They struggled to find appropriate materials that address both linguistic and professional competencies.

The lack of well-defined curriculum frameworks and readily available CLIL materials specifically designed for Business English presented another major hurdle. Many lecturers reported adapting existing materials, leading to inconsistencies in approach and potentially compromising the effectiveness of the CLIL approach. When discussing authentic materials with the participants, it was clear that this was an area where they placed a lot of focus. The spread of materials was wider than we had anticipated and included use of internet sites, movie clips, news broadcasts, lab situations, field visits, analysis of artifacts, and visits by guests in the classroom. Workbooks were used occasionally in one of the classrooms for form-focused activities, which were then separated from the content-integrated projects. None of the participants were using textbooks extensively and hence selected a lot of materials from different sources. The materials selection is a time-consuming and important part of preparation work in the CLIL setting Technology for interactive learning was also limited.
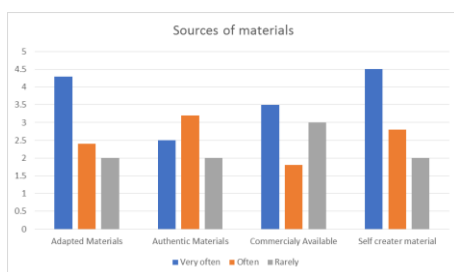

Figure 2: Use of teaching materials in CLIL

4.2 Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation methods accurately reflecting content mastery and language skills presented a significant challenge in assessing students' learning within a CLIL context. Many lecturers expressed difficulty in fairly assessing both language skills and content knowledge, leading to concerns about the validity and reliability of assessment methods. They lacked clear guidelines on how to integrate language and content assessment within a single grading framework

4.3 Student Engagement and Participation

Many educators noted a lack of student motivation and engagement, primarily due to varying language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds. This diversity often hindered collaborative learning opportunities essential for CLIL.

Student feedback revealed mixed perceptions regarding the CLIL approach. While some students valued the integrated learning experience and improved language acquisition, others expressed challenges in keeping up with the content and language

demands simultaneously. Concerns were raised about the pacing of lessons and the need for more individualized support.

4.4   Teacher Training and Development

A significant theme emerging from the interviews was the inadequate training of lecturers in CLIL methodology. Many lecturers lacked the pedagogical expertise to design and deliver CLIL lessons effectively. They expressed a need for professional development opportunities focusing on CLIL principles, materials development, and assessment strategies specific to Business English. In addition, they emphasized encountering difficulties balancing business content with English language teaching.

5.   DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the challenges faced by Business English teachers implementing CLIL are multifaceted. To address these challenges, institutions should provide professional development opportunities focused on CLIL methodologies and resources. Additionally, fostering a supportive environment that encourages collaboration among educators could enhance teaching practices. The findings highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing the success of CLIL implementation in Albanian universities. The lack of adequately trained teachers, coupled with limited resources and a lack of institutional support, creates a significant barrier to the effective adoption of CLIL. The mixed student perceptions underscore the need for careful curriculum design, differentiated instruction, and appropriate assessment methods to address varying learning needs and styles.

6.   CONCLUSION

This qualitative study sheds light on the complex challenges university teachers encounter while implementing CLIL to teach Business English in Albanian universities. Addressing these issues is crucial for the successful integration of content and language learning, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for students in the global job market.

While the potential benefits of CLIL are significant, addressing the identified challenges related to teacher training, resource availability, curriculum design, assessment, and institutional support is crucial for successful implementation. By implementing the recommendations outlined above, Albanian universities can overcome these obstacles and create a more effective and sustainable CLIL approach to Business English instruction, ultimately benefiting students and enhancing their employability in the globalized marketplace.

7.   RECOMMENDATIONS

- To offer training and professional development opportunities for course instructors on effective assessment and evaluation strategies and their implementation for content and language integration that measure both language proficiency and content knowledge, ensuring fairness and validity.
- To invest in comprehensive teacher training programs focusing on CLIL methodology and Business English specialized technical vocabulary.

- Promote the development of relevant CLIL materials based on local context, and design authentic and engaging materials tailored to the Albanian context and Business English needs.
- To design curriculum frameworks: and set up detailed guidelines for CLIL implementation in Business English courses, including learning objectives, assessment criteria, and resource recommendations.
- Promote collaboration among stakeholders: Foster partnerships between universities, businesses, and international organizations to share best practices and access resources.

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