

# THE EFFECT OF IMPLEMENTING CLIL ON SUBJECT LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS ENGLISH

*Eda Cauli*

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to outline the effect of implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in teaching Business English through task-based practice. This includes gap-filling exercises, words in context activities, reading comprehension of ESP texts, translation of specialized terms, and oral presentation rubric. Students were divided into a CLIL and a Non-CLIL group. The aim was to assess students' speaking skills in terms of acquisition of subject-specific profession-related terms depending on the used approach. The obtained qualitative data revealed higher progress of the students in the CLIL group. The results support the importance of CLIL methodology as a relatively new and more effective approach for an overall improvement of language skills and more specifically for the development of communicative competence in terms of teaching Business English terminology and ESP as an important part of preparation for problem solving in real-life situations enhancing future career opportunities.

*Keywords: content, subject, specific, vocabulary, communicative competence, CLIL*

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach that integrates both language and content learning (Coyle, 2008). The term CLIL was first pioneered by European language educators and experts in the 1990s (Coyle 2002). Since then, a high number of institutions, at first within the European educational settings, introduced CLIL in their curriculum.

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Eda Cauli – University of Tirana, Albania. Doctoral student at New Bulgarian University

*Eda Cauli*

CLIL is more than just teaching some topic content in an additional language. The strategy attempted to expand and reinforce learners' knowledge of different disciplines while allowing them to solve problems and develop critical thinking skills through the use of the language. The CLIL method was primarily designed to help students develop their communicative competences such as interpersonal and intercultural skills and cognitive abilities as well, while learning through the norms and rules of the material in the language they were studying (Gabillon, 2020). Bloom's taxonomy defines a clear framework for learners on how to develop their cognitive skills and states that learning itself should promote the cognitive involvement of learners (Krathwohl 2002). This cognitivist theory has strongly influenced the CLIL approach. CLIL's tasks proposals contain a cognitivist theoretical approach. CLIL methodology was defined as a more practical and adaptable approach towards learning a new language and this found a good place in bilingual education where content-based language instruction was used. Many scholars preferred to define it as a 'generic umbrella term' with multiple dimensions and applications where an 'extra language' is employed for both subject and language instruction (Coyle, Marsh, & Hood 2010). While for Marsh (2008) it is "*diverse methodologies are used together which lead to dual-focused education where attention is given to both topic and language*", Smit & Dafouz (2012) preferred to paraphrase it as: "*learners are engaged in a joint learning practice of subject matter and foreign language*". Several studies have shown that combining content and language teaching not only aids in the acquisition of linguistic and academic competences but it also provides various cognitive and motivational benefits for the learner. CLIL may be content-driven when the main focus is the subject or it can be language-driven when the focus is the language itself; even if the focus is on one or the other at any time, they are intertwined. Therefore, the role of the teacher is essential and it serves as "a language mediator" aiming to build the bridges between learners and new topic knowledge (Ball, Kelly, & Clegg 2015).

## Methodology

The CLIL approach is adaptable to the learners' needs, their linguistic competency, and academic accomplishment. Referring to the European Union official policies<sup>1</sup> (Eurydice 2017: 55), which provide high-quality information on how education systems are organized in Europe and how they function, it refers to CLIL as an innovative educational approach which is used to enhance the simultaneous development of both subject and language learning. It has a dual-aimed focus that is predicted to bring a range of benefits to learners' linguistic ability, motivation, risk-taking, active participation, problem-solving, meta-cognitive ability, study skills, and autonomy among many other positive sides listed. CLIL is neither a new type of language education nor a new type of subject education. It is a unique combination of the two: teaching a subject in a foreign language and simultaneously learning a foreign language through the content of that specific appointed subject. According to Mossino (2018), the general structure of a CLIL lesson plan must include the following components:

- **CONCEPTS:** the content you will teach.
- **PROCEDURES:** the language skills used to teach the concepts like speaking, writing, reading, listening, and critical thinking.
- **LANGUAGE:** the grammar and vocabulary used in the lesson.
- Aiming to create an effective CLIL oriented learning environment, Mehisto (2008) refers to some other key features to be considered, as follows:
- Grade-appropriate functional competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the CLIL language.
- Age-appropriate levels of first language competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/>

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- The cognitive and social skills and habits are essential for success in an ever-changing environment.
- An understanding and appreciation of the cultures associated with the CLIL language and the student's first language
- The cognitive and social abilities, as well as the habits, are necessary for success in an ever-changing world.

### **Aims and objectives of the study**

This experimental research study attempted to explore the integration of CLIL through the application of some CLIL materials and activities with a group of students in their first cycle of Bachelor studies at the faculty of Economy of the University of Tirana. Students were encouraged to use some of the CLIL techniques for the acquisition of specific/ profession-related language terminology and communicative skills. After placing their language level and ensuring a higher intermediate level of English, students were divided into two respective groups; one was the CLIL Group = 'Experimental Group' where students covered specialized topics of profession-related terminology by implementing CLIL teaching techniques/ activities in their Business English classes and the other was the Non-CLIL Group = 'Control Group' where students received classes of English language, following the curricular-based program of English language at the university. With the help of some controlled and semi-controlled practical activities, the improvement of the quality of ESP communicative competences of students at the university level through the implementation of CLIL approach in their ESP classes was tested and measured.

### **Research instruments**

This research was carried out through the lead of some needs analysis questionnaires, a language placement

test, some controlled and semi-controlled activities such as the use of the Rubistar platform<sup>2</sup> for the realization of some task-based learning activities aiming to test the oral and vocabulary skills, reading and writing for formal correspondence, in terms of students' communicative competences and subject-specific content knowledge. Some practical exercises and task-based activities were generated and applied, which helped in collecting some more specific data. After completion, students had to choose one of the listed categories as ranked from (4-excellent to 1-satisfactory), and self-assess themselves based on the performance and confidence they had for the assigned skill. In the second phase, with the help of some self-assessment questionnaires, the final difference in language proficiency in terms of better communicative competences and subject-specific profession-related terms in the business English class was measured.

### Findings

The students' attitude towards their communicative competences was measured with the help of the "Oral Presentation Rubric" generated by Rubistar Platform. After several discussion topics of both CLIL and Non-CLIL lessons for one academic semester, notes were taken down and students got assessed by two teachers, evaluating their oral communication skills and then independently each of the students had to complete a final questionnaire by assessing their strong and weak points faced during the delivery of their speeches. The use of vocabulary for subject-specific terminology in context, in regard to business English terms, was measured through the application of the Rubric "Reading for Analyzing Information" as stated below.

The overall number of 28 respondents for the two groups, who already accomplished all the activities, is presented in the tables below. These figures were then processed and calculated the average of both groups in the two phases of the experimental research study and then all the obtained data were represented in units as in the graphs below:

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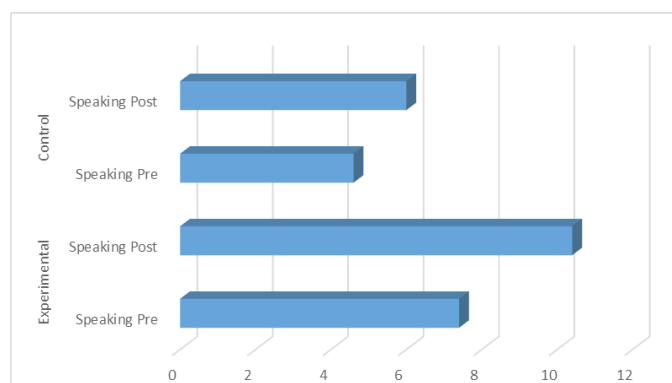
<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>

### Communicative Competence Skills

A considerably higher progress is seen in the Experimental CLIL group where students have shown better comprehension of specific profession-related terms and in their choice of vocabulary by reaching the scale of 3 units, while the Control group reached the mean of only 1.4 units. Comparing the students' learning progress in both groups, it is clear that the Experimental group, which received lessons through CLIL Methodology, scored 2.1 times higher.

**Table 1.** *Students' attitude towards communicative competence skills*

Themes/ Activities	Occurrences			
	Experimen- tal Group Pre-Inter- vention	Experimen- tal Group Post-Inter- vention	Control Group Pre- Intervention	Control Group Post-Inter- vention
Comprehen- sion	7	10	4	5
Vocabulary	6	9	3	4
Content	9	12	5	6
Speaks clearly	7	9	5	7



**Figure 1.** *Speaking: Oral Presentation Rubric*

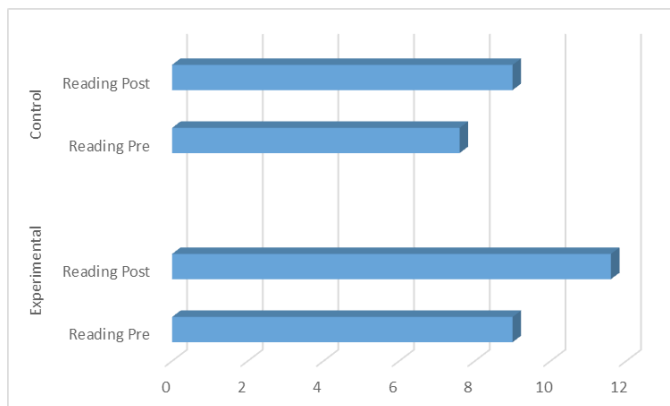
Based on the students' responses, the CLIL group has shown more significant confidence in terms of learning specialized vocabulary during their classes received through CLIL activities, which would also serve in need for their future career life.

This result coincides with the one received from the reading comprehension activities taken in the survey with the students, so this is a good indicator of where the experimental CLIL activities have revealed a significant difference from the appointed curricular-based learning activities.

**Table 2.** *Students' attitude towards reading for analyzing information*

Themes/Activities	Occurrences			
	Experimental Group Pre-Intervention	Experimental Group Post-Intervention	Control Group Pre-Intervention	Control Group Post-Intervention
Reading; Analyzing information & words in context exercise				
The student is able to infer the meaning of unknown words using context clues.	9	12	7	8
The student identifies important information by listing all the main points of the article.	10	13	9	11
The student accurately explains how each graphic/diagram is related to the text, and accurately determines whether each graphic/diagram agrees with the information in the text.	8	10	8	9
The student clearly relates information to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples.	10	12	8	9
The student is able to summarize the article in oral communication by using 1-3 sentences to describe clearly what the article is about.	8	11	6	8

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**Figure 2.** *Reading for analyzing information and words in context exercise*

The comparative analysis of reading comprehension rubric and the word in context activities of both CLIL and Non-CLIL groups clearly showed that during the whole semester there is evidenced of some good progress in both groups in regard to comprehension of specific terms and the identification of graphs and diagrams by representing their exact visual information into words and texts' completion through the help of words in context. In addition, the Control group progressed to 1.4 units while the Experimental one reached 2.6 units. Overall, the Experimental group (CLIL group) is 1.85 times higher when compared to the Control group. This shows that CLIL activities for the reading tasks have resulted more successfully in students' reading comprehension and text analysis.

### **Students' attitude towards writing for formal correspondence**

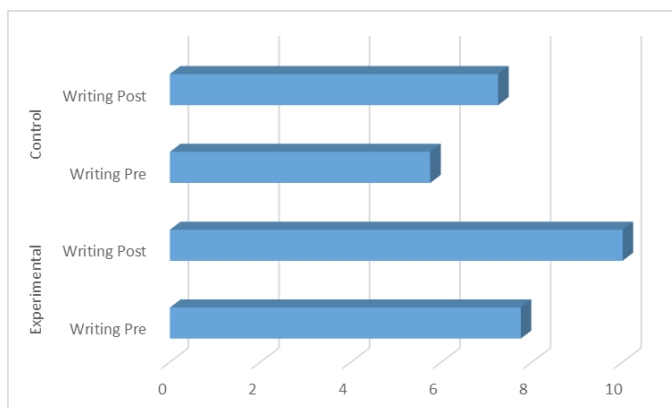
Writing for formal correspondence was also considered for the extraction of some data through the evaluation of drafting some formal documents like reports, contracts, emails and preparing other business documents in English like CV, reference letters, business



brochures where students were observed for their use of ESP terms and their flexibility to cope with them.

**Table 3.** *Students' attitude towards writing for formal correspondence*

Themes/Activities	Occurrences			
	Experimental Group Pre-Intervention	Experimental Group Post-Intervention	Control Group Pre-Intervention	Control Group Post-Intervention
Writing formal correspondence; reports, contracts	7	9	4	5
Drafting other formal documents; emails, memos	9	12	8	10
Preparing other business documents in English; CV, reference letters, business brochures	8	11	6	8
Easily coping with ESP text writing (e.g. formal correspondence, analytical reports, specialized articles, etc.)	7	8	5	6



**Figure 3.** *Writing for formal correspondence*

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Both groups were tested for drafting specific business documents like reports, brochures and other analytical papers and it was established that the Experimental group coped more easily with the ESP terms in terms of texts' writings. Both groups have performed a considerably higher progress by reaching 1.5 units for the Control group and 2.25 units for the Experimental group. The final results show that the Experimental group has performed 1.5 times better than its counterparts as, obviously, the **CLIL** methodology has been a more motivating indicator and facilitator to master the Business English terms more easily.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the overall students' attitude towards the Implementation of CLIL and Non-CLIL intervention stages proved that the implementation of CLIL approach was much more engaging and motivating for the learning process of subject-specific terms in the business English classes when compared to the Non-CLIL group. Clearly, this is an indicating factor stating that the performance of CLIL was more effective when compared to teaching English as a curricular subject (Non-CLIL), as the experimental CLIL activities have revealed a significant difference from the appointed curricular-based learning activities. Based on the students' responses, where the CLIL group has boosted stronger confidence in terms of learning specialized vocabulary and content comprehension during their classes received through CLIL activities, this would also serve as a very helpful tool for the student's future career life.

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