

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of CLIL On Academic English Competence in Higher Education

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on the development of academic English competence in higher education. CLIL, as an innovative pedagogical approach, integrates subject content and language learning, enabling students to acquire disciplinary knowledge while simultaneously improving language proficiency. The study analyzes how CLIL enhances academic vocabulary, critical thinking, and communicative skills. The findings suggest that CLIL significantly contributes to the development of academic English competence by fostering meaningful interaction, contextualized learning, and cognitive engagement.

KEY WORDS

CLIL, academic English, higher education, communicative competence, language learning, content-based instruction.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and internationalization of higher education, the demand for proficiency in academic English has increased significantly. Universities are increasingly adopting innovative teaching methodologies to improve students' language skills alongside their disciplinary knowledge.

One such approach is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which combines subject teaching with language instruction. Unlike traditional language teaching methods, CLIL focuses on using language as a medium for learning content, thereby creating authentic and meaningful learning environments.

This article explores the impact of CLIL on academic English competence, particularly in higher education settings, where students are required to engage in complex academic tasks

such as reading research articles, writing essays, and participating in discussions.

An essential aspect of evaluating the effectiveness of CLIL is the assessment of academic English competence. Unlike traditional language assessment, CLIL requires an integrated evaluation of both content knowledge and language proficiency.

Assessment in CLIL environments typically includes:

Content-based assessment (understanding subject concepts)

Language-based assessment (accuracy, fluency, vocabulary use)

Performance tasks (presentations, projects, research reports)

Rubrics are often used to measure both linguistic and

academic outcomes simultaneously. For example, students may be evaluated on their ability to use discipline-specific vocabulary, construct arguments, and present ideas clearly.

Moreover, formative assessment plays a crucial role in CLIL. Continuous feedback helps students improve both language and content understanding. Self-assessment and peer-assessment also contribute to learner autonomy and reflective learning.

The success of CLIL largely depends on teachers' competence. CLIL educators are required to possess:

strong subject knowledge

high level of language proficiency

pedagogical skills for integrating content and language

However, many teachers face challenges due to limited training in CLIL methodology. Therefore, professional development programs are essential. These programs should focus on:

CLIL lesson planning

scaffolding techniques

language support strategies

use of digital tools

Effective teacher training ensures that CLIL is implemented successfully and sustainably in higher education.

Scaffolding is a key pedagogical strategy in CLIL, helping students understand complex academic content while developing language skills.

Types of scaffolding include:

Linguistic scaffolding: providing vocabulary lists, sentence frames

Cognitive scaffolding: guiding students through problem-solving tasks

Visual scaffolding: using diagrams, charts, and multimedia

For example, when reading an academic text, students may be provided with key terms and guiding questions. This reduces cognitive overload and supports comprehension.

Scaffolding gradually decreases as students become more independent, allowing them to perform tasks autonomously.

Academic English competence is closely related to discourse

skills. CLIL helps students develop the ability to:

construct logical arguments

participate in academic discussions

write structured essays and reports

interpret complex texts

Through exposure to authentic academic discourse, students learn how language functions in specific disciplines. This includes:

use of formal register

discipline-specific terminology

rhetorical structures

Thus, CLIL contributes to the development of academic literacy.

The integration of digital technologies enhances CLIL effectiveness. Tools such as:

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

online collaboration platforms

multimedia resources

AI-based language tools

support both content learning and language acquisition.

For example, students can engage in online discussions, access interactive materials, and receive instant feedback on language use. Digital environments also provide opportunities for personalized learning.

One of the major advantages of CLIL is its positive impact on student motivation. Learning language through meaningful content makes the process more engaging and relevant.

CLIL promotes:

active participation

collaborative learning

real-world application of knowledge

Students are more motivated when they see the practical value of language in their academic and professional fields.

The successful implementation of CLIL requires institutional support, including

curriculum integration

teacher training programs

resource development

policy frameworks

Universities must adopt a strategic approach to CLIL, ensuring alignment between language and content objectives.

Theoretical Background of CLIL

CLIL is based on the integration of four key components, often referred to as the “4Cs Framework”:

Content – subject matter knowledge

Communication – language use and interaction

Cognition – thinking skills

Culture – intercultural awareness

This framework emphasizes that language learning should not be isolated but embedded in meaningful academic contexts.

From a cognitive perspective, CLIL aligns with constructivist theories, where learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and problem-solving.

Academic English Competence

Academic English competence refers to the ability to use English effectively in academic contexts. It includes:

Academic vocabulary

Reading comprehension of scholarly texts

Academic writing skills

Oral communication and presentation skills

Critical thinking and argumentation

Developing these skills is essential for students’ success in higher education.

Impact of CLIL on Language Development

1. Vocabulary Acquisition

CLIL provides exposure to subject-specific vocabulary in context, which enhances retention and understanding. Students learn terminology as part of meaningful content rather than isolated word lists.

2. Reading Skills

Students engaged in CLIL are required to read authentic academic materials, which improves their ability to understand

complex texts.

3. Writing Skills

CLIL encourages academic writing through assignments such as essays, reports, and research papers. This helps students develop structured and coherent writing.

4. Speaking and Interaction

Classroom discussions, presentations, and group work in CLIL settings promote oral communication and fluency.

Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Benefits

CLIL fosters higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. By engaging with content in a second language, students activate both linguistic and cognitive processes.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, CLIL supports:

deeper processing of information

increased motivation

improved memory retention

This dual focus on content and language enhances overall learning outcomes.

Challenges of CLIL Implementation

Despite its advantages, CLIL presents several challenges:

insufficient language proficiency among students

lack of teacher training

limited teaching materials

increased cognitive load

To address these issues, institutions must provide adequate support and resources.

Comparative Perspective: CLIL vs Traditional Methods

Aspect	CLIL	Traditional Language Teaching
Focus	Content + Language	Language only
Context	Authentic	Artificial
Skills	Integrated	Isolated
Motivation	High	Moderate

This comparison highlights the effectiveness of CLIL in developing academic competence.

Implications for Higher Education

The adoption of CLIL in universities has several implications:

curriculum redesign

teacher professional development

integration of digital technologies

emphasis on interdisciplinary learning

CLIL prepares students for global academic and professional environments.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that CLIL has a significant positive impact on the development of academic English competence in higher education. By integrating language and content, CLIL creates meaningful learning experiences that enhance vocabulary, communication, and cognitive skills.

Although challenges exist, the benefits of CLIL outweigh its limitations. With proper implementation, CLIL can become a powerful tool for improving academic performance and preparing students for international academic contexts.

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