



## Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) Learners English Language Acquisition

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### Abstract

This essay aims to outline the potential of the CLIL method in helping Non Native English Speaking (NNES) students studying in Anglosphere countries to optimize their English competence. Existing literature were analysed to explore how CLIL also plays a role in developing students' English learning while they are comprehending subjects' content. These studies show that CLIL has a positive relationship with students' motivation; thus, it can develop their English ability. Moreover, CLIL has the Triptych concept or three interrelated aspects of language processing: 1) language for learning; 2) language of learning; 3) language through learning. These perspectives reflect how language can be integrated thoroughly into certain subjects with more time compared to the length of time in traditional classrooms.

### Keywords:

CLIL, EFL, language competency

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## INTRODUCTION

For more than a couple of decades, a method called Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has come into fashion in educational systems in Europe. CLIL is an alternative educational method that combines language and content teaching simultaneously (Gené-Gil et al., 2015; Mehisto et al., 2008). CLIL has also drawn attention to the education sector since 1990, and many countries have successfully adopted CLIL in their institutions and have witnessed its benefits (Mehisto et al., 2008). The pivotal potential of CLIL is integration, where subjects' content may be the dominant focus in one situation, and more attention can be given to the language aspect (Dale and Tanner, 2012). As a dual-focused approach, CLIL not only stimulates cognitive flexibility but also promotes linguistic competence and cultural awareness (Coyle et al., 2010; Gené-Gil et al., 2015).

This concept offers a better advantage than previous methods such as the CLBT. If CLBT can only be implemented restrictedly in English subjects and in limited hours, CLIL can increase exposure to the target language in a longer time and in any other subject (Gené-Gil et al., 2015). In other words, according to Nikula et al., 2013, CLIL

gives opportunities for content and language learning combination in ways that are difficult to implement in language classrooms.

At the Higher Educational levels in anglosphere countries, for example, the demands for teaching content of subjects and English language at the same time seems to be increasing because of the internationalization agenda. International programs of various subjects are offered to invite foreign students to study together with native students. To optimize the learning process and communication between students and lecturers and between students, the CLIL method seems promising. This leads to the following question: In what ways does (CLIL) method optimize the language development of EFL learners? This essay aims to outline the potential of the CLIL method to help EFL students optimize their English competence.

## **METHOD**

Through studies of relevant theories on the significance of CLIL for NNES students, I argue that the CLIL method can be an alternative to help EFL learners develop their language competence in L2. Some important notes were found after reviewing several studies that examined the CLIL method from the perspective of language competence. An overview of the potential of CLIL in developing students' English competence as a foreign language appears in Section 2, while I also discuss CLIL and the variable-level language processing of students in this section. Section 3 presents the conclusions, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***The Potential of CLIL in Developing EFL Students' English Competency: In What Ways***

#### ***1. Through Positive Relationship between Motivation and Learners' Language Achievement***

Student's motivation plays a significant role in developing students' language competence as motivation is a determining factor of L2 learning (Lasagabaster, 2011; De Smet et al., 2018). Oxford and Shearin (1994) also emphasized that once a student has motivation, they will have a goal of achievement in language, an urge to achieve it, and positive energy and behaviour towards accomplish it. Some studies have outlined how the CLIL method can be used to achieve the learning motivation of learners so that they will acquire progress in their language competence.

Lasagabaster (2011) examined the correlation between motivation and English language proficiency attained by learners in a bilingual community where the official languages there are both Basque and Spanish. English as a third language was taught through two different methods: CLIL and traditional EFL methods. First, the motivation questionnaire was distributed to two different groups who received different methods to compare which method is better in boosting students' motivation (Lasagabaster, 2011). Then, some tests in grammar, listening, writing, and speaking were conducted to see the correlation between students' motivation and their scores. Lasagabaster (2011) noted that the results showed that the CLIL approach tends to generate more positive response of motivation compared to traditional EFL contexts. As a result, these motivational responses through appropriate methods raise students' language-learning interests. In addition, some studies conducted to date in Europe have

confirmed the CLIL and motivation relationship, especially the motivational effect from CLIL programs on language attainment (Doiz et al., 2014; Seikkula-Leino, 2007).

In more detail, CLIL not only works on students' general motivation but also has a significant impact on students' attitudes, which is a subsequent level of motivation (Doiz et al., 2014; Paran, 2013). Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009) stressed that CLIL program can raise a positive attitude among students, because a higher proficiency level of language achieved may trigger more affirmative to develop their language competence more." This argument is confirmed by the results of Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009), who examined the effectiveness of CLIL in holding more positive attitudes among EFL students. Through questionnaires, it is suggested that students studied in CLIL groups found that it was easier to learn English than students who learned English using traditional EFL methods (Doiz et al., 2014; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2009). This means that the CLIL approach may contribute to improving EFL learners' language competence by triggering more positive attitudes towards English.

## *2. Through a variety of students' language processing aspects*

A unique feature of the CLIL method is that it is supported by Coyle's Language Triptych concept. Based on this concept, language activities in CLIL are well organized by occupying three perspectives that are interrelated each others: language for learning; language of learning; and language through learning (Coyle et al., 2010). This concept reflects how language can be integrated thoroughly into certain subjects with more sufficient time compared to the length of time that traditional classrooms have (Mehisto et al. 2008). In short, CLIL seriously considers the importance of the language aspect, which emphasizes the benefits of CLIL if implemented for international students whose their first language is not English.

### *2.1. Language of Learning*

Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) explained that in the first perspective, the language of learning, students are given the time to learn particular vocabularies to access the basic concept of the subject. Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008) state that this kind of language includes technical vocabulary of particular subjects, special expressions or phrases and multiple meanings of words. Thus, when learners are studying the concept of a particular subject, they also adjacently receive the input of important languages needed, with more natural and sufficient time of exposure (Coyle et al., 2010).

A study conducted by Catalán and Zarobe (2009) examined how two different groups of EFL learners receive two different methods: CLIL and the traditional EFL method, and showed significant differences in vocabulary test results. A number of receptive vocabularies that had been taught to the students using two different methods were tested. The first group learned specialist terms of science subject through CLIL instruction, while the second group was taught the same terms without CLIL in their English subject. The findings showed that students who got instruction when they studied certain subjects through CLIL had remembered more terms than students who were enrolled in a single language program (Catalán and Zarobe, 2009). Furthermore, this study argued that more exposure and instruction in the CLIL group were the main

factors of this effectiveness. As Catalán and Zarobe (2009) implicitly say, CLIL offers a meaningful way rather than just a memorizing activity to develop students' achievement in L2 vocabulary.

In the CLIL method, the expected goal from learners is not only how many vocabularies they build, but also how to apprentice students into the language of their subject (Llinares et al., 2012). Therefore, besides to technical vocabularies or special expressions, Llinares, Morton, and Whittaker (2012) developed a language learning area wider to the genre aspect. Llinares, Morton, and Whittaker (2012) state that by understanding the genre, knowing the functions of different texts of a subject, the characteristics of each type of text, and how they are constructed through specific language structures, students will acquire generic competence. In other words, the CLIL method may raise students' specific genre awareness, thereby fostering their writing and reading skills (Abebe, 2013).

Abebe (2013) conducted an experimental study involving Ethiopian EFL learners to examine the role of CLIL in enhancing students' genre awareness in their EAP class. Two different groups were treated through CLIL and non-CLIL instruction in a legal course. Then the two groups of students took an authentic family law exam in the form of an essay. The results suggested that CLIL practices involving authentic communicative activities give students more opportunities to develop their awareness of the text provided, so they can discover texts meaning in the target language.

## 2.2. *Language for learning*

The second perspective of Coyle, Hood, and Marsh's (2010) language triptych is language for learning. They explained that students use a type of language that is necessary to use in a foreign language situation, such as explaining, answering, and questioning, showing agreement or disagreement in discussion, or writing a simple argument. According to Llinares, Morton, and Whittaker (2012), the situation is called Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), in which teachers and students utilize specific language resources to be used in various activities in the classrooms. Agreeing with this concept, Várkuti (2010) also noted that in academic environment, the language will focus on certain grammar aspects connected to cognitive tasks, like analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating which are incorporated in Bloom taxonomy. Dale and Tanner (2012) in addition similarly argued that various academic languages depend on the subjects that are taught and learning outcomes. For example, in geography lessons, the cognitive process demanded is explaining how or why a natural process works, or arguing a geographical issue; thus, the language focus will be causal linking words and phrases about the result, effects, or consequences of an event, and also judgment words or linking words to show logical relationships (Dale and Tanner, 2012).

Várkuti (2010) conducted a study to demonstrate how CLIL can improve students' academic language (CALP). The study compared between the language competence of foreign students in Hungarian-English CLIL programs and non-CLIL EFL language programs. Both respondents groups had assessment to measure vocabulary in context-deprived situations. The findings concluded that students with CLIL instruction possess a larger active and passive lexicon, abstract concept-to-language, good phrases, and English expression. Várkuti (2010) argued that CLIL

classroom will create more challenging situation for students to understand the language, resulting in improved linguistic competence.

### *2.3. Language through learning*

Llinares, Morton, and Whittaker (2012) argued that there is potential for developing opportunity to experience informal socialization in classroom as Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) define this type of language as language through learning, in which students will experience the new language that emerges through learning unconsciously. By optimizing group work to interact with the target language to discuss or learn a subject, a range of opportunities for the development of pragmatic competences arises. This type of language also reflects Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), a term created by Cummins in 1979 to refer to the everyday language required to interact socially (Llinares et al., 2012).

Hüttner and Rieder-Bünemann (2010) investigated the competence of a group of German learners in speaking after being treated using two different methods: CLIL and EFL instruction. The aspects of linguistic competence investigated include how students create coherency in their narrative and how they master the language system, such as tense choice and vocabulary used. By using a picture, both groups were initially asked to narrate the picture in their L1, which was German. Subsequently, they were asked to retell their narratives to an English –native researcher. The findings reported that CLIL students were more successful in using communicative and functional language. Also, they could produce accurate utterances lexically and grammatically (Hüttner and Rieder-Bünemann, 2010). One finding from Hüttner and Rieder-Bünemann's (2010) study that relates to students' BICS revealed that CLIL students could get enough input so they are clearly better equipped to deal with various conversation situation.

### ***The Potential of CLIL in Developing Students' English Competence as Foreign Language: How***

Generally, the CLIL method is driven by the principle of the 4Cs framework, which encompasses content (subject matter), communication (language learning and use), cognition (thinking processes), and culture. Regarding communication, the primary focus is on language use and learning (Coyle et al., 2010). To ensure that this principle is run well, Mehisto et al. (2008) argued that this method is also supported by several core elements, including enriching the learning environment, multiple focus, authenticity, cooperative work, scaffolding, feedback, and plentiful language activities. Most of these features are found in the studies discussed earlier, in which all studies examining the effectiveness of CLIL from NNES students' language achievement point of view.

First, a large number of studies have completely agreed that the CLIL method gives maximum English exposure as well as input to students, compared to EFL classrooms. As Lasagabaster (2011) stated, CLIL has been reinforced by the belief that an optimal goal cannot be achieved in a traditional teaching of foreign language. This is because the traditional approach has limitation of time of time and the input is usually distributed in very small doses, thus causing poor a real communicative function. The second core feature is how the CLIL method provides authenticity in a

classroom environment. Pinner (2013) argued that authentic materials are produced to give an experience of the language in use rather than to transmit declarative knowledge about the target language. In addition, Pinner (2013) emphasized that authenticity basically are those that are used by students as sources of language input for a language. Also, authenticity may also be defined as tasks set to engage with. The more authentic the materials and the environment of the classroom are, the bigger the change of students to get the maximum input from the lesson.

The third feature of the success of the CLIL method is the interaction between teachers and students, as well as between students and students, to negotiate meaning through many meaningful classroom activities. Llinares, Morton, and Whittaker (2012) noted that the negotiation of meaning refers to collective, in which teachers and students learn tasks together; reciprocal, in which students share ideas and different points of view; supportive, where students have freedom to articulate their ideas without feeling embarrassed over wrong answers; and purposeful, at which teachers plan specific goals for the classroom. Group work and role play are considered useful for developing communicative foreign language competence (Llinares et al., 2012). In addition, any classroom activity that puts a large portion on students rather than teachers can influence the negotiation of meaning. Supporting language learning in content classrooms, or as Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008) call multiple focus, is an important feature in CLIL. This is very helpful in enhancing students' cognition, and thus influences their motivation and language achievement. As Peeter Mehisto and Marsh (2011) stated, 'Managing two or more active language systems demands extra cognitive resources, so students will have more opportunity to practice cognitive skill, and this skill can be accelerated through practice'.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims to outline the potential of the CLIL method to help NNES students optimize their English competence when they study in Anglosphere countries. Many studies have revealed various methods and strategies to improve EFL learners' language competence, and these findings have contributed to ensuring that the CLIL method can be an alternative that works for NNES students. This is because, first, CLIL method can make the language use and language learning can present adjacently within classroom context, McIntyre (1996) stressed that language learning cannot be separated from other kinds of learning that humans do. In addition, language learning should be merged to educational goals especially for students who are studying foreign languages in the context of school; and second, because CLIL method strongly support the basic principles of Second Language Acquisition in organizing language learning, such as meaning negotiation and vocabulary mastery.

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