

# CLIL AS A MEANINGFUL PATHWAY TO REDEFINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Jhonathan Alexander Huertas-Torres, Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Colombia

## Abstract

This article gives account of the pedagogical interplay that CLIL could have as an educational approach within a pre-selected undergraduate group of International Business students. It presents a proposal that considers the importance of providing learners with an embedded, functional and curricular model, in which languages and content interrelate simultaneously. In the same line of thought, it suggests a set of materials and resources which could be applied according to particular educational settings, and puts forward a five-step elemental procedure to follow, along with guidelines for teachers to implement CLIL within their university classes.

## Introduction

Colombian traditional education models have been immersed within our society for many decades up to now. Features such as memory, severity, and even low sympathy, have been made part of many students' class routines who have been perceived by their "authorities" as non-critical subdued learners. Ochoa (2005) states that the traditional model focuses on the faculties of the soul as: understanding, memory, and will. The basic learning method is the academicism-verbalism characterized by classes under regimes of discipline to learners who are passive receptors. This indicates that teachers could be considered as the ultimate knowledge holders.

Snow, Met, and Genesee (as cited in Lyster, 2007) stated that “whereas language development and cognitive development go hand-in-hand for young children, traditional methods tend to separate language development from general cognitive development” (p. 1). To clarify, traditional methods tend to disregard any practical content from enhancing cognitive processes.

At present, CLIL has been applied in various educational settings, and it is considered an innovative strategy to teach content in a language that differs from the students' own, bearing in mind the present alignment between traditional methods and its low-impact contribution to students' academic achievements; an approach emerged, so that it can be applied as a medium for learning within a particular academic field, while language and cognitive development work together in favor of the learners' needs.

## Theoretical overview

Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) describe CLIL as “an educational approach in which various language-supportive methodologies are used which lead to a dual-focused form of instruction where attention is given both to the language and the content” (p. 3). Based on the previous assertion, this paper aims to capture the essentials of its features so as to incorporate practical problem-solving business scenarios where students could interact and create context-driven instruction in tandem with language skills development.

Fernández (2009) carried out a proposal at Universidad Nacional del Litoral, which correlated language teaching with and through content teaching. He found CLIL-oriented EFL settings suitable and convenient, since he came to the realization that there is no problem to define what language to teach, but considered principles, such as avoiding redundancy, that is to say, not teaching students what they have already learnt in their own language. Teachers ought to omit banality; in other words, they should not test students on topics they have already been tested; to put it simply, they should not oversimplify content issues.

Hence, he noticed that it was more meaningful to allow learners to use, negotiate, and remodel subject-matter meaning rather than merely introduce new, but isolated, content from distinct academic environments.

Likewise, Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) assert that the 4 C's framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture) consolidate learning and language learning. Therefore, within the higher education context, CLIL may serve as a flexible and sustainable approach since it encompasses global goals, cultural aspects, and a variety of subject content, along with communicative and cognitive features which could be expanded depending on the educational community needs and standards.

## Context

Within higher education, it is fundamental to consider the implementation of a more holistic educational approach in order to meet further academic needs regarding content and languages. In a constant, globalized world, knowledge should be based on experimentation along with a medium that shapes not only what is being learned, but how it is being conveyed.

Therefore, this proposal intends to be carried out at tertiary education level, as it would permit students to become critical thinkers by means of pre-selected academic settings related to their own fields of study. Thus, it is expected that they are capable of mastering diverse types of contents, considering several types of communication (what to learn and how to learn) and gaining meaningful learning outcomes along with a foreign language experience.

In higher education worldwide, it is intended to implement subjects in foreign languages as part of the universities' language policies. Therefore, CLIL could be a suitable approach initially applied with International Business students as a manner of instruction in which both language and content could be merged. CLIL encourages students to become more active participants through the development of their capacity to attain the required knowledge and the necessary skills to take part in authentic, everyday scenarios.

## Implementation of a CLIL model in higher education

When it comes to introducing a new proposal, it is paramount to reflect on the importance of providing students with a functional and meaningful curricular

subject matter. Thereby, learners can get acquainted with the content areas, so they can develop specific competences in the regular language of instruction. Delhaxhe et al. (2006) claim that CLIL is conceived under a twofold objective, as a bridge to ensure that students acquire knowledge of certain areas and to strengthen competences in a language other than the one of instruction.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned targets, it is likely to consider that the International Business program could incorporate a merged curricular model that provides a variety of pedagogical reasons for introducing CLIL. According to Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), the 4 C's model "can only be implemented in very specific types of higher-education institutions (for example, business and management faculties where students attend courses with a reasonable level of proficiency in the target languages)" (p. 25). By introducing this approach, students should be able to become conversant with this model, as they would master its content progressively as well as the ability to acquire multiple skills in more than one language before complete immersion in any working environment.

Additionally, this model would be appropriate initially for the International Business students, since this would contextualize learners in favour of a more globalized, functional, authentic, curriculum-based learning, in order to develop confidence and intercultural knowledge within real life scenarios. Learners need to be exposed to different situations in which they are challenged and prompted to analyze and understand aspects of social and economic relevance.

This proposal aims to foster and empower students' business skills by introducing and persuading potential projects to markets under international standards and by expressing their thoughts in an approachable yet informative manner, so that both, the target audience and the presenter, can boost active communication and analyze worldwide marketing strategies to supply large-scale solutions. In this sense, the viability of the proposal could progressively measure obtained outcomes by means of ongoing feedback and evaluation.

## **Suggested materials and resources**

Specific materials and resources are necessary to be implemented according to the context and teachers' experiences. Additionally, it is required to enrich and

enhance key elements teachers use (e.g., syllabus, scope and sequence, and lesson plans) in order to impact, adapt the contexts, and apply the acquired knowledge by means of the following stages:

1. *Conduct a survey aimed at identifying learners and teachers' preferred topics and how these could be tackled throughout the semester.*
2. *Get conversant with the 4 C's (Cognition, Culture, Content and Communication) along with setting specific aims, criteria for assessment, as well as illustrating the importance of maintaining the relevance of language and content.*
3. *Implement the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) by means of tasks that empower affective and cognitive factors along the learning processes.*
4. *Design meaningful settings that benefit language learning, oriented to the development of critical competences and communicative and professional contexts.*
5. *Implement midterm tests/surveys in order to monitor the ongoing process.*

## CLIL characterization and implementation

Implementing a CLIL module requires time, observation, constant supervision, compromise and commitment from all participants. [Table 1](#), outlines in general terms, what is intended with a straightforward CLIL proposal; it provides a basic description of the steps to follow, from implementation to suggestions.<sup>1</sup>

## Closing remarks

This proposal is intended to support foreign language learning policies at a tertiary education level, pinpointing the need for non-English speakers to be proficient in a foreign language. Hence, the aforementioned CLIL proposal refines and strengthens specific academic fields implicit in the curriculum to benefit the stakeholders and attain an overall better performance. CLIL is prone to being applied at any higher educational setting, as it affords a holistic pedagogical view regarding 21st century's learners' needs, as languages cannot be fragmented from the knowledge itself, but devoted by means of a thorough cultural fusion. This approach could be adapted to any curriculum, as it is flexible and open to the ongoing revisions that could emerge throughout contemporary learning processes.

<sup>1</sup> Refer to *Table 1. CLIL proposal*

Table 1. CLIL proposal

Steps	Activity	Type of Task	Expected Outcomes	Tips/Suggestions
1. Train yourself	Become acquainted with the CLIL principles, as well as with the characteristics that outline its virtues.	Review the <a href="#">British Council webpage</a> to have a grasp on CLIL:	Participants are expected to understand the fundamentals of CLIL and how to incorporate its basic principles (the 4 C's) within classes.	Create a mindmap that displays at least two educational-linguistic perspectives.  For example: <i>How do publicity messages impact society?</i>  Intertwine the use of language with a given situation to solve.
2. Get conversant with the target groups	Along with the students, brainstorm a list of topics to work on.	It is suggested to tackle Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) for linguistic purposes and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) for subject matter purposes.	Teachers design a CLIL lesson plan proposal considering general features, such as: target groups, time, topics, TBLT, and CBI approaches in order to come up with an embedded perspective, and the expected outcomes where language and content have the same level of importance.	Apart from the topics that emerged, consider a relevant key language gap in which learners prove interest.  For example: <i>What vocabulary would you use to design a creative advertising campaign?</i>
3. Material design	Based on the selected topics, teacher(s) start(s) working on new materials, such as worksheets, forums, oral presentations, public exhibitions, etc.	Self-designed materials are key. Take into account a scenario where students feel empowered and comfortable.	Students develop the suggested activities that require them to analyze, create, evaluate, and apply meaningful learning.	Create tasks that permit students to breakdown, design, and give reason for situational settings they are fond of exploring.  <i>Being mistaken is a step forward towards the knowledge threshold.</i>
4. Implementing material	Apply the designed material, taking into account the balanced effectiveness between language and content.	Consider the target population as to implement critical thinking skills by reasoning diverse ideas.	The designed material is expected to foster students' critical thinking skills and apply gained knowledge on real life scenarios (through the use of the 4 C's.)	Tasks such as: <i>Analyze the following advertising campaigns. What would you implement to make them more commercially efficient within a more globalized and inclusive world?</i>
5. Assessing CLIL implementation	Design a rubric where stakeholders record the most important features either to reinforce or continue using it.	Conduct an individual survey in which stakeholders speak their minds on the impact the sessions had on their overall academic performance.	Feedback concerning the advantages and disadvantages of implementing the CLIL modules. Co-evaluation is essential to strengthen the implemented approach.	Discuss and analyze the rubric results with the academic community. Focus on: <i>Benefits, aspects to enhance, and aspects to change.</i>

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### Author Bio

Jhonathan holds a B.A. in Foreign Languages—English, Spanish, and French (Universidad de la Salle), a diploma in TESOL (Anaheim University), and an M.A. in English Language Teaching for Self-Directed Learning (Universidad de la Sabana). Currently, he is an English professor at Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano and Institución Educativa Técnico Industrial Tocancipá affiliated with Gobernación de Cundinamarca. He has obtained an international exchange in the USA and has participated as a lecturer in various conferences. He is interested in CLIL, EFL, classroom management, self-directed learning and autonomy, standardized tests, and smart goal setting.

