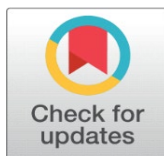


# NEED AND SCOPE FOR CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) AT THE TECHNICAL DIPLOMA LEVEL IN KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

Technical diploma holders who come out of polytechnic colleges are expected to acquire theoretical and subject-based skills in addition to adequate English language skills. In reality, they lack many of these aspects. A method of teaching which supports both subject learning and language acquisition can help to overcome this inadequacy. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an instructional approach that combines subject matter instruction with language learning, leveraging the classroom environment to enhance both content and language skills. This learner-centred method necessitates the collaboration of content and language teachers to prepare and deliver integrated lessons effectively. In CLIL, content, communication, cognition, and culture are equally prioritized, allowing for flexibility and adaptation to meet specific contextual needs.

**Keywords:** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Content-Based Approach, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Kerala, polytechnics have been established with the goal of developing technicians and technical supervisors who possess both robust content knowledge and subject-based skills. English language skills are also integral to their learning. In reality, there are significant inadequacies in these aspects. A deficiency in English language skills often results in limited subject learning. This paper focuses on assessing the viability of CLIL in this context, considering the essential learner and learning factors that contribute to the overall learning experience.

In Kerala, numerous experiments have been conducted to develop an effective curriculum for teaching English. These include Teaching English through literature, Explicit grammar-based approaches, Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Integrated skill development programs and Communicative approach and Content-based approach (e.g., the textbook English Communication used in Polytechnic general English classes, prepared by the Technical Teachers Training Institute, Chennai). Additionally, structural approaches focusing on drills of basic structures,

fluency-based models, and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) experiments modelled after N. S. Prabhu's Bangalore Project (1979-1984) have been implemented in both government projects and by entrepreneurial enthusiasts. English medium schools in the state have long practiced an immersion model, promoting content learning in the target second language.

The emphasis on methodology for acquiring English in classroom settings, as highlighted by learning outcomes and research, reflects a significant shift in English language education in Kerala. The incorporation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) models in higher education syllabi and curricula, along with governmental initiatives like the Additional Skills Acquisition Programme (ASAP) and the Good English project by the Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority, underscores the focus on communication skills. This trend highlights the growing necessity for targeted skill-based language learning programs to enhance the English communication abilities of learners in Kerala.

The dual objectives of language use—enhancing basic communication skills and developing academic knowledge—are well-defined by educational experts. However, these goals have not been fully realized. This is evident in the minimal academic contributions of many technical students to their fields and careers. A major reason for this is that academic content, intended to be taught in English, is often delivered in the mother tongue, with teachers acting as translators. This practice results in a dual inadequacy: students neither master the content effectively nor achieve proficiency in English.

Successful completion of the diploma course requires both writing and speaking skills. Writing skills are evaluated in final exams, while speaking skills are assessed through oral tests as part of practical exams and seminar presentations within continuous evaluations (CE). Beyond these immediate academic demands, proficiency in both subject matter and language is essential in the workplace. Instead of compartmentalizing skill development in academic content classes, ample opportunities should be provided for the comprehensive development of all four language skills.

Teachers dealing with real classroom situations often recognize that learners lack essential English language skills. Learning tends to be primarily rote, with students expressing ideas in flawed language and struggling to write accurate answers. Upper intermediate level learners are expected to demonstrate accuracy and fluency, but many fall short of these expectations. Moreover, these learners are expected to enter the workforce soon after completing their courses. Language classes offer opportunities for developing specific language skills needed in daily life and workplaces, but the training is intense and limited due to the minimal hours allotted for language instruction. While these classes promote both free and guided writing, time constraints hinder the promotion of speaking, despite support in the language curriculum.

There is significant potential for developing English language skills in current subject classrooms, but this opportunity is often denied to learners due to the predominant use of the mother tongue in subject content delivery. This issue becomes evident when evaluating the learners' written and spoken responses. Without proper and adequate input for receptive skills, both the receptive and productive skills based on them are found to be deficient.

A primary inquiry into this matter reveals several hindrances to language acquisition. One significant issue is the lack of proper exposure to the English language. Additionally, the inability to use classroom contexts for meaningful communication in the second language (L2) is another major drawback. Other

aspects, such as a lack of motivation and interest, as well as limited time, must be addressed to excel in English. Achievement tests conducted in polytechnics indicate that most learners who have completed their secondary education have inadequate English language skills. This underscores the need to evaluate the language learning process in schools.

Manjooran L., in his Ph.D. research, identified that teachers are often confined to textbook teaching, leading learners to miss the crucial aspect of absorbing and becoming aware of the target language as a whole. An article in the Times of India by Nair highlights the inadequacies in English skills, particularly speaking skills, as a significant issue for students in schools. Additionally, an article in Online Manorama reports that the lack of English teachers in schools adversely affects English language acquisition. Furthermore, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the General and Social Sector for the year ending March 31, 2014, pointed out that learners are not adequately prepared for their next grade in schools, specifically referencing the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Kerala.

Most learners who join technical diploma courses lack the language skills they should have developed by the end of their secondary education, as identified through the first-hand experience of this researcher. During the three-year diploma course, there are no special interventions or programs to improve English language skills. Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) are addressed by English teachers in general English classes, with a focus on discourses needed for their careers. However, the primary issue of inadequate language skills remains unaddressed, leaving learners as inexperienced users of English. This deficiency poses a significant barrier to subject learning at this level, as academic content learning requires a higher level of specific language skills known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Learners who have completed a three-year diploma course often lack both the content knowledge and the associated language proficiency. To achieve the desired results in an engineering diploma, this issue must be resolved.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) (2006-09) recommends reforming the pedagogy of English language teaching and using all available media to supplement traditional teaching methods. The discrepancy between the expected and actual outcomes of content classes highlights the lack of essential cognitive, thinking, and language skills necessary for successful content learning. This defective learning process hinders learners' academic and professional success.

The language inadequacy that impedes the learning process needs to be addressed within a limited time. This requires a twofold constructive remedy. First, basic language skills (BICS) must be enhanced in general English classes through a change in English pedagogy and the introduction of a supportive syllabus. Second, it is necessary to go beyond English language classes by transforming content classes into a content and language supportive system. By integrating different aspects of content and language learning, classroom instruction can simultaneously improve language skills and support content learning. This approach ensures that learners acquire the English proficiency needed for both daily life and academic success, equipping them with the specific language skills required for their subjects.

The eighty-five polytechnic colleges in Kerala offer extensive opportunities for technical engineering diploma courses. Graduates of these courses are expected to possess both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, positioning them as a supervisory category between skilled ITI certificate holders and engineering graduates. This crucial role requires both strong communication skills and technical expertise. Diploma holders have promising career prospects in national and

international companies, and the assurance of job opportunities is a significant aspect of these courses.

Diploma holders also have the option to pursue engineering graduate courses through lateral entry directly into the second year. This path allows them to leverage their technical experience and excel in higher studies. However, despite their potential, their aspirations for better job prospects and higher education are often hindered by inadequate English language skills. Those who secure positions in national and international firms frequently struggle to perform effectively in supervisory roles due to a lack of communication skills. Feedback from stakeholders in the job market and educators supports this observation.

A crucial aspect of this study is the impact of inadequate English language skills and incompetency in using academic content knowledge on the academic growth of learners. Many find it challenging to grasp technical terms and language, leading to limited content learning. Consequently, many students resort to rote learning, which fails to support them in real-life situations. By the end of the three-year diploma course, they remain at an incipient stage of content learning and English language skills.

Several factors contribute to this issue, including an overloaded syllabus, lack of motivation, ineffective teaching methods, and time constraints. The urgency of purposeful learning in a three-year diploma course is emphasized, and students do not get another chance to develop subject-based language skills after this course. This immediate need, combined with the emphasis on subject-specific learning, leaves little room for language development in the current system. A pedagogical approach that integrates both content and language could address this issue.

English language acquisition in polytechnics primarily occurs in English language classes, where English as a medium of communication is often limited to textbooks in content classes. Only the first two semesters are allocated for English language classes, with four periods per week. The syllabus, prepared by the State Institute of Technical Teachers' Training and Research (SITTTR) in Kalamassery, has evolved. Until the 2015 revision, English textbooks focused on language development through literary pieces, grammar activities, and a few communicative skill topics. The 2015 revision introduced more practical and user-specific English for Specific Purposes (ESP), reflecting the immediate need to improve learners' language skills. However, learners also need English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to benefit fully. Content delivery in the mother tongue and rote learning, along with text-based evaluation in exams, undermine the quality and excellence expected from these learners.

Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1981) are essential terms to understand. BICS are the everyday conversational skills that should be developed by the end of secondary education. However, these skills are insufficient for excelling in academic content learning. CALP, the more specific academic language proficiency, must be developed during academic content classes and extends beyond basic communication skills.

The language demands of an engineering diploma course are vast and intense, requiring students to verbalize abstract thoughts and ideas. Diploma students need both BICS and a high level of academic English proficiency (CALP). However, the current system reveals a deficiency in content-specific language acquisition, as BICS alone are inadequate for diploma students, leading to struggles with CALP.

Thinking beyond traditional English language classes, there is immense potential for language development within subject classes. This approach leverages

subject content as the context for language development, a method unique in its focus on using language for "knowledge construction" (Dalton-Puffer 65). In this context, language learning differs from what typically occurs in language classes. It involves the concepts of language of learning, language for learning, and language through learning, as outlined in the Language Triptych (Coyle et al. 36). This natural way of integrating language and content learning encourages learners to actively use language for content-related purposes, thereby facilitating effective language acquisition.

The shift from a traditional, teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred model reflects a significant change in the learning process. This transition moves away from the "banking model" of education, as described by Freire (1970), where knowledge is passively received from the teacher, towards a more interactive and dialogic teaching method, as advocated by Alexander. In this new learning setting, interaction and dialogue become central to the educational experience. This approach effectively addresses common issues related to confidence, interest, and opportunities for using language. By allowing learners to construct their own knowledge, the classroom environment enhances motivation and engagement, making the learning process more dynamic and participatory.

The aspects that support both language learning and subject learning come together in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach that integrates content instruction with language learning through the target language. The primary goal of CLIL is to achieve "functional competence" (Llinares et al. 2), emphasizing practical use of language in context. CLIL can be implemented through various models, adapted to specific contexts and time periods. Originating from the broader Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework, CLIL extends beyond Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) to resemble an immersion model, while maintaining a balanced and flexible approach. This methodology has gained widespread popularity in language acquisition, leading to the establishment of CLIL schools, the development of CLIL teacher training programs, and the creation of CLIL accreditation systems, particularly in Europe. In many European countries, CLIL has become the official language teaching methodology, supporting the promotion of multilingualism through a three-language policy.

Various language and content learning methodologies have been employed worldwide, and these diverse approaches often converge at specific points where different aspects come together to support one another. This convergence is the foundation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The modern era's social and economic changes facilitate this integration, as the CLIL timeline encompasses social, cultural, learning, and psychological theories, contributing to a comprehensive and effective learning method.

## 2. CONCLUSION

A twofold strategy is necessary to address language inadequacies that impede the learning process. First, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) should be enhanced in general English classes through a revised pedagogy and syllabus. Second, content classes should be transformed into environments that support both content and language learning. By integrating language development with subject-specific technical content, students can improve their English proficiency while mastering academic subjects. This approach not only enhances general language skills but also equips the technical diploma learners with the specific language needed for success in both academic and everyday life.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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