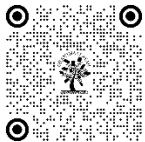


# HOW CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) SUITS POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS IN KERALA: SUPPORTIVE FACTORS AND A DESIGN

Dr. Arun George<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English, Government Polytechnic College, Adoor, Kerala



## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.2080](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.2080)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**Copyright:** © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



## ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) provides an effective framework for simultaneous content learning and language acquisition. Its flexibility allows for contextual adaptations, making it suitable for local needs and learner requirements. By fostering meaningful and interactive learning environments, CLIL motivates students to construct knowledge and develop a wide range of skills actively. This paper explores the supportive factors that enhance CLIL's effectiveness in the polytechnic context and presents a tailored CLIL model specifically designed for polytechnic students in Kerala.

**Keywords:** CLIL, Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), Constructivism, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Input Hypothesis, Immersion Programme, Transmission Oriented Approaches, ASAP, English as a Second Language (ESP), Continuous Evaluation (CE), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Scaffolding, Lesson Observation and Critical Incident Technique (LOCIT)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a highly effective approach that combines content mastery with language acquisition. One of the key strengths of CLIL is its flexibility, which allows for adaptations to meet local needs and the specific requirements of learners. For polytechnic students, who often engage in vocational and technical education, the CLIL approach is especially beneficial. Its focus on real-world applications and task-based learning helps learners not only acquire new language skills but also develop industry-relevant competencies. Furthermore, the motivating and dynamic nature of CLIL encourages students to take an active role in their own learning, constructing knowledge that is directly tied to their field of study. This will be effective with the help of a design viable to suit polytechnic students aligning with the Preparation, Activity, Revision (PAR) structure. The first part of this paper deals with the positive factors that support the implementation of CLIL in polytechnic education. The following aspects of CLIL show how it is feasible for the needs of the context of polytechnics.

Content learning and language acquisition in academic classes offer significant time-saving benefits, particularly in polytechnic education. From the third semester onward, 95% of the time is dedicated to content learning, while in the first two semesters, 80% is allocated to subjects other than English language learning. This substantial focus on content

presents an opportunity to integrate language acquisition seamlessly, using solid subject matter as the context for learning. As noted by the Commission of European Communities (2003: 8), CLIL "provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum." By embedding language learning into content instruction, students can develop both subject-specific knowledge and language proficiency without the need for additional classroom hours, making the process efficient and time-effective.

CLIL fosters the development of cognitive skills and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) by actively engaging learners in producing spoken or written output. This process encourages students to think through their ideas, articulate them, share knowledge, give and receive feedback, and refine their thoughts while negotiating solutions. As Dale et al. (2011: 121) highlight, CLIL promotes an environment where learners are challenged to express and adapt their ideas, leading to deeper cognitive engagement. Additionally, CLIL empowers learners to engage in creative thinking, as it supports a dynamic exchange of ideas that encourages innovation and problem-solving within the learning process.

CLIL creates an environment where the natural use of language enhances learners' motivation and enthusiasm for language acquisition. As Marsh (2000: 6) notes, this "natural use of language" can significantly boost students' motivation and desire to learn languages. The intrinsic motivation arises because the learning process itself becomes a driving factor, making students more engaged and eager to develop their language skills. Through meaningful content and contextualized language use, CLIL fosters a motivating learning atmosphere where language acquisition feels purposeful and relevant to learners' interests and academic goals.

Coyle et al. emphasize the importance of fostering creative thinking, problem-solving, and cognitive challenges in the CLIL methodology, in addition to acquiring knowledge and skills (29, 30). Real classroom interaction plays a crucial role in this process, as it helps develop learners' observation and problem-solving abilities. By encouraging active participation and authentic communication, CLIL not only enhances language proficiency but also promotes critical thinking and the ability to tackle complex problems, making learning both intellectually stimulating and practical for students.

There are ample opportunities for both skill and knowledge development without imposing fixed standards for learning in CLIL. It accommodates learners at various proficiency levels, allowing slow learners and quick learners alike to progress at their own pace. As Graddol notes, "the learner is not necessarily expected to have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study" (86). This flexibility ensures that learners can engage with content and language simultaneously, making CLIL an inclusive approach that supports diverse learning needs and encourages gradual development.

CLIL promotes the development of communication skills through meaningful interaction, offering a natural method of language acquisition. Students learn to speak and write in personalized ways that they develop themselves, which simultaneously supports content learning. This approach allows learners to create new personal meanings, aligning with social constructivist theories of learning. As Coyle et al. (11) explain, "Second language learning can be achieved when people have the opportunity to receive instruction, and at the same time experience real-life situations in which they can acquire the language more naturalistically." By embedding language use in authentic contexts, CLIL encourages a deeper, more organic mastery of both language and content.

CLIL offers a wide range of multimodal language input, catering to diverse learning styles, including those outlined in Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory. By incorporating various modes of learning—visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and more—CLIL ensures that learners engage with content in ways that best suit their individual strengths. This approach also aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, as learners are exposed to different forms of input that challenge them just beyond their current level of proficiency, facilitating language acquisition. By working with a variety of input forms, students can better internalize both language and content, fostering deeper learning.

## **2. EXTENT OF CLIL EMPLOYED IN POLYTECHNICS**

It is essential to determine the appropriate extent of CLIL to be implemented in polytechnics. In content classes, CLIL is often necessary and should be the primary focus of CLIL pedagogy. However, the approach may need to be adapted based on students' language proficiency and learning needs. In Kerala, for example, learners come from diverse

educational backgrounds, with students from both English and Malayalam medium schools displaying varying levels of language ability. Even those with an English medium background may have inadequate language proficiency. In such cases, Soft CLIL can be employed selectively when the teacher identifies that language limitations are hindering content learning. This flexibility allows for a more inclusive and effective learning environment that accommodates the needs of all learners.

Marsh et al. highlight the benefits of exposure to CLIL in enhancing language proficiency. They argue that "target language competence may be improved to a very high level of fluency through high exposure to CLIL and other forms of language learning." At the same time, they acknowledge the value of lower exposure, stating that "low exposure can be used to improve overall competence, particularly if the CLIL experience serves to convert existing knowledge of the language into skill by giving the learner further opportunities for practice" (33). This suggests that regardless of the level of exposure, CLIL offers valuable opportunities for learners to develop language proficiency, either through intensive immersion or through reinforcement of prior knowledge.

### **3. EU AND CLIL AND EARLY FORMS OF CLIL - WHAT SHOULD BE THE FORM OF CLIL IN KERALA?**

Teaching through a second language (L2) has deep historical roots, dating back to the Roman Empire, where the Romans learned Greek through various subjects after conquering the Greek Empire. In the modern era, this approach resurfaced in the 1950s, with increasing attention to cognition in education, as noted by Coyle and others. Early examples of language-content integration can be seen in Canadian immersion programs and U.S. bilingual education, both of which are connected to the CLIL model. In Europe, CLIL has been shaped by political, educational, and socio-economic factors, particularly the demand for an English-proficient workforce. However, the predominance of language learning in CLIL has sometimes led to an imbalance, where language is prioritized over content. This issue has been compounded by teacher-centred, transmission-oriented approaches, as discussed in a video on plurilingual education. David Marsh, in 2007, emphasized CLIL's flexibility, noting that it can adopt different models depending on the educational goals of a specific context. This adaptability makes CLIL an evolving framework that responds to the needs of diverse learning environments.

### **4. LEARNING METHODS AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS**

The current education system tends to foster lower-level thinking skills and encourages rote learning, where students primarily engage in passive activities such as listening to lectures and focusing on basic comprehension. This approach leaves significant gaps in developing essential skills, as many learners rely on flawed methods and struggle with self-learning, demonstrating weak critical thinking abilities and limited language proficiency. Policies in place up to the secondary level often support these inadequacies, ultimately producing learners with mediocre or subpar abilities. Consequently, when students reach higher education, particularly in diploma programs, they continue to expect teachers to provide them with complete knowledge, adhering to the belief that learning only occurs through direct instruction. This mindset creates resistance to more interactive or independent learning methods. To address these shortcomings, institutions have introduced corrective measures like Finishing Schools, Scholar Support Programs, and holistic initiatives such as the Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP). These programs aim to compensate for the lack of foundational learning and equip students with the skills necessary to thrive in the modern workforce. However, for these interventions to be fully effective, the deeply ingrained notion that learning is exclusively teacher-driven must be challenged and replaced with a more dynamic and student-centred approach that encourages critical thinking, self-reliance, and lifelong learning.

### **5. CLIL DESIGN**

CLIL design is not bound by rigid rules, offering considerable flexibility to adapt activities locally and contextually. While CLIL activities may be effective in regions like the European Union, these approaches might not be feasible in places like India due to factors such as affective elements, physical infrastructure, administrative systems, and existing educational shortcomings. In the context of polytechnics in Kerala, a CLIL model must be customized to meet the specific needs of learners, requiring continual redesign and modification. An interventionist approach in classrooms is necessary to actively address challenges and improve outcomes. Designing such a model should follow the principles of backward design, as suggested by Wiggins and McTighe, where educational goals and outcomes are clearly defined first, and

activities are developed to meet those goals. Additionally, Morgan identifies two key considerations for implementing CLIL: contexts and purposes, emphasizing that within any given context, there can be a plurality of purposes. This underscores the need for a flexible, purpose-driven CLIL approach that aligns with the unique needs of polytechnic students in Kerala.

## **6. PHASES IN CLIL**

A comprehensive CLIL design involves three key stages: the preparatory phase, the classroom or transactional stage, and the evaluation phase. The success of any CLIL model heavily relies on the preparatory work done by the teachers, as this groundwork sets the foundation for effective content and language integration. The classroom phase, or transactional stage, builds on this preparation and encourages both self-learning and collaborative learning among students, making it an interactive and dynamic process. The evaluation phase goes beyond assessing individual learners; it also evaluates the effectiveness of their learning processes and the overall CLIL system being implemented. This holistic evaluation ensures that the CLIL model is functioning as intended and provides insights for future improvements, helping refine the design to better meet learners' needs.

## **7. PREPARATORY PHASE IN CLIL**

The preparatory phase of CLIL design involves several crucial tasks to ensure the effective integration of content and language learning. Collaboration among teachers is essential, as it helps in understanding the needs, limitations, and strengths of learners, as well as identifying factors that influence learning outcomes. A thorough analysis of the curriculum, along with the adaptation of texts, is necessary to align content with the CLIL approach. Teachers must also prepare teaching and learning aids, including audio-visual materials, to enhance accessibility for students. Clearly defining the roles of language and content teachers is key, as it ensures that their tasks inside and outside the classroom are well-coordinated. Planning activities should consider learner needs, content, and language elements, ensuring that both are seamlessly integrated. Texts should be adapted to include CLIL-compatible tasks and activities that blend language skills with content knowledge. Furthermore, identifying the specific genres required for each subject will allow for targeted activity planning. Teachers should be prepared to adopt both proactive and reactive approaches to meet the varying demands of the learning context, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness in delivering the

## **8. CLIL MODEL**

### **THE TRANSACTIONAL PHASE**

The classroom phase of CLIL emphasizes the active roles of both learners and teachers, as well as the phases in the learning process. Learners, being the central stakeholders in education, are at the core of the CLIL model, which adapts to their needs and abilities. Learning is highly student-centred, progressing at a pace that suits individual learners. In the classroom, learners are not passive recipients but active participants in their education. As Coyle et al. point out, CLIL encourages learners to engage in inquiry, develop knowledge and skills, and use complex cognitive processes for problem-solving, fostering innovation (6). The adapted text, as well as teaching and learning aids, are designed for use by learners, who engage with the material both individually and in pairs or groups.

Teachers play a supportive role, guiding the learning process and intervening when necessary. A typical model for CLIL activities includes stages such as activating prior knowledge, guiding understanding, focusing on language, speaking, writing, and finally, assessment with review and feedback (Dale and Tanner 30). These stages can be adjusted in terms of timing and intensity depending on the classroom situation. The collaborative efforts of ESL teachers and content teachers are crucial; they may either alternate roles, work together, or teach in separate, allotted classes. The flexibility of CLIL allows teachers to use a variety of methods, catering to the diverse needs of the learners and the content being delivered, making it a dynamic and adaptable educational approach.

## **9. ASSESSMENT, REVIEW AND FEEDBACK**

Assessment in CLIL is grounded in a rubric collaboratively developed by both learners and teachers, emphasizing continuous evaluation (CE) as an integral part of the learning process. This approach facilitates ongoing individual feedback for students, enhancing their understanding and performance. Peer assessments and reviews further promote collaboration, allowing learners to engage with one another in evaluating their work while also involving teachers in the

process. The collaboration between content and language teachers extends to assessment practices, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of student progress.

Additionally, both teachers and students engage in analyzing the CLIL design and classroom activities to identify effective techniques that resonate with the local context. This reflective practice can be facilitated through Lesson Observation and Critical Incident Technique (LOCIT), as discussed by Coyle (2008: 97-112). LOCIT involves peer observations, where a colleague observes a lesson, combined with the critical incident technique, which focuses on specific events or moments in the classroom that can lead to insights for improvement. This systematic approach to observation and reflection supports the refinement of teaching methods and techniques, ultimately enhancing the learning experience in CLIL settings.

## 10. CLIL ACTIVITIES

Masih outlines two overarching aims of CLIL: first, to achieve learning outcomes in chosen subjects that are comparable to those in standard mother tongue curricula, and second, to provide learning outcomes in a second language (L2) that surpass typical curriculum standards (47). To fulfill these aims, classroom activities must be carefully designed to align with the learning processes within the CLIL framework. This often includes incorporating Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities within a content-driven context.

The selection of CLIL activities is crucial, as the success of the entire program hinges on these choices, which should be informed by the specific demands and needs of learners. The learning environment plays a significant role in this process; factors such as classroom layout, furniture, the availability of teaching and audio-visual aids, support from management, and the overall flexibility of the educational system contribute to promoting a liberating learning atmosphere.

Activities should emphasize hands-on experiences that encourage active learning and engage all the senses. Techniques like brainstorming and information-gap activities directly connect students to the learning process, fostering engagement and collaboration. Referential questions can stimulate meaningful conversations and language use within the classroom. Moreover, peer scaffolding is encouraged, allowing students to participate in the "co-construction of knowledge" (Llinares 100), further enhancing their understanding and integration of both content and language. This collaborative approach not only enriches the learning experience but also cultivates a supportive classroom community.

## 11. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, CLIL offers a promising and adaptable framework for polytechnic education, combining language learning with vocational content to enhance students' competencies in real-world contexts. It has to a great extent supportive in solving issues in language acquisition, HOTS and acquiring subject knowledge in polytechnics in Kerala. By incorporating the PAR structure—Preparation, Activity, and Revision—into CLIL design, and using the structured phases, polytechnic students are provided with a structured, active learning environment that supports language acquisition while aligning with their technical studies. The findings presented in this paper highlight the positive factors that make CLIL a viable and effective approach for the polytechnic context, enabling students to take ownership of their learning and apply it in practical, industry-relevant ways.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None

## WORKS CITED

- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge University Press
- Dale, L., & Tanner, R. (2012). *CLIL activities: A resource for subject and language teachers* (S. Thornbury, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Basic Books.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of "English as a foreign language"*. British Council.



- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Llinares, A., Morton, T., & Whittaker, R. (2012). *The roles of language in CLIL*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marsh, D. (2000). *Using languages to learn and learning to use languages: An introduction to content and language integrated learning for parents and young people*. University of Jyväskylä. Retrieved from <https://www.jyu.fi>
- Marsh, D., Maljers, A., & Hartiala, A. K. (2001). *Profiling European CLIL classrooms*. University of Jyväskylä.
- Marsh, D. (2007). Report by the core scientific team. *Study on the contribution of multilingualism to creativity*. EACEA 3995.2. Retrieved from <https://www.jyu.fi>
- Morgan, C. (1999). Teaching history in a foreign language: What language? In J. Masih (Ed.), *Learning through a foreign language: Models, methods and outcomes* (pp. 52-64). CILT Publications.
- Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.