

# **The role of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in teaching English for Tourism: challenges and implications for ESP teachers**

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## **Abstract**

CLIL programs at the university level are usually associated with ESP courses, we analyze the case regards to the position of CLIL and ESP in Tourism study. As CLIL programs are promoted to improve students' language proficiency in English, we explore the importance of language learning in these programs and the implications derived from ESP. Data were obtained from class observation and also lecturer and student views on CLIL expressed in focus groups and a questionnaire. Findings show imprecise guidelines for CLIL implementation. Although we can observe a well-organized shift from ESP to CLIL, lecturer and student perspectives provide useful insights for action that can be taken by ESP course designers to adapt courses to make them more relevant to students' discipline-related needs. Deal with these findings, we propose engaging in collaboration with content lecturers to advance Tourism Department's graduates' proficiency in English.

**Keywords:** *CLIL, ESP, Tourism, language proficiency*

## **1. Introduction**

The roles of language and content are important for research, specifically their integration and the lessons which can be learnt from the ESP perspective to adapt to this new situation (Novawan, et al., 2019). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which has grown since the 1990s has been defined as an educational approach in which subjects are taught through the medium of a foreign language to students at all educational levels. Some approaches emphasize the dual integrative focus on content and language, taught by subject specialists or team teaching. The levels of integration can be distinguished according to the content which is the primary goal of the course under the control of the specialist instructor. Lately, CLIL courses ranging from the absence of the integration of language and content to managing full collaboration between language and discipline specialists involving independent content and language courses. Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) tailors language instruction to disciplinary needs, based on the collaboration of language and subject specialists and the CLIL model which involves the team teaching of dual programs for language and content. This distinction helps in the analysis of CLIL programs in terms of language and content and the roles played by each.

An analysis of CLIL and ESP within the Tourism Department of Jember State Polytechnic (Polije) has noted an increase in CLIL programs and a decrease in ESP courses in redesigned curricula, as content subjects in English are being offered instead of ESP subjects. This vulnerability of ESP in CLIL contexts is regarded as a subsidiary role, it means the integration of content and language are inextricably linked to ESP, and especially EAP, which has expanded worldwide as English has become the dominant language of instruction and research. Some central ESP/EAP issues that have been the objects for debate over the years are relevant to the integration of language and content are EAP materials, which has led to the distinction between English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001: 23). The extent of collaboration between EAP and subject-matter specialists sustained interaction between content and language lecturers is not common, probably due to a traditional lack of interaction between disciplines. However, the counterbalanced instruction can serve as models for integrating form-focused instruction into content instruction as can – in the ESP context – the course described based on cooperative learning and the development of soft skills through authentic discipline-related materials.

This study provides insight into the implementation of CLIL programs at the Tourism Department in Polije from an ESP perspective. Our main objective is to examine both the practices and views of lecturers and students. Precisely, we look into the role of language learning in CLIL settings from which we make proposals for collaboration between content and ESP lecturers. The article, from a qualitative perspective, presents an analysis of the role and status of CLIL versus ESP in the Tourism Department, observing content courses in terms of linguistic objectives, language focus in classroom discourse, and participants' perspectives on the relationship between CLIL and language. The insights gained through the analysis of policies, practices and views inform our discussion of how ESP can adapt to these new pedagogic scenarios. This is mainly through proposing new roles for ESP specialists, encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration, and reappraising the position of ESP courses. Due to the pressure by Polije to include an obligatory EAP subject in the Tourism Department because of the obvious need in English both spoken and written for communication. The presence of ESP/LSP courses at the Tourism Department is not guaranteed, a situation similar to other programs like Agribusiness Department and Informatic Technology Department.

## **2. Method**

The implementation of CLIL courses at the expense of ESP raises questions related to the collaboration between content and language lecturers, and the development of academic literacy through content-focused discourse. In order to shed light on this issue, this paper analyses CLIL courses in the Tourism Department. Within a general qualitative, exploratory approach, this study explores the role assigned to language in CLIL and the implications that can be derived for ESP/EAP, both for proposing a collaboration with content lecturers and for adapting ESP/EAP courses.

The specific research questions are as follows:

- a. What is the status of CLIL and ESP courses in Polije's Tourism Department?
  2. For the CLIL classes observed, are there any expected linguistic outcomes? Have they explicitly been mentioned in the course syllabi? Is there an explicit focus on language in classroom discourse? Does participants' language proficiency become an issue in the classes observed?
- b. What are lecturers' and students' views on the implementation of CLIL, and the role assigned to language? What are their views on CLIL versus ESP?

Following a qualitative approach, this study combines different types of data and methods of analysis through a process of triangulation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) to provide an exploratory of the context observed, paying attention to participants' views and practices. Accordingly, an inductive approach was adopted by which the categories and topics of discussion were derived from the analysis and interpretation of the data. Data for this research thus include:

- a. documents related to university policy regulation of specific course syllabi;
- b. observation of CLIL classes;
- c. lecturers' and students' views on the introduction of English as the medium of instruction.

The Tourism Department was selected because they offered CLIL classes during the last academic year. There had been previous collaboration in the Tourism Department with other departments and CLIL had recently been implemented, in a context with a strong presence of ESP. The classroom data come from the following subjects: Hotel Management, Hospitality Management, Food and Beverage services, and Tour Travel Management. The information about those subjects was obtained from the course descriptions on the websites and analyzed for the presence or absence of language content. A corpus of four class sessions was collected through video recording and transcription, of which four lessons were analyzed for this study.

All classes were recorded around mid-term and they were analyzed for:

- a. episodes in which language or communication became salient;
- b. language focus;
- c. communication breakdowns; and
- d. repaired versus unrepaired language production.

Data on participants' views were collected through focus groups with participants in CLIL. Two separate focus group sessions were held with lecturers only and students only. The lecturers formed groups from different classes and then the focus groups followed semi-structured guidelines, by which participants were prompted to discuss terms in Tourism in English. For this study, attention was paid to lecturers' and students' views and experiences in CLIL. The sessions were video-recorded and transcribed, amounting to almost three hours of data. The final source of data was a questionnaire consisting mostly of closed items, distributed among Tourism students. The questionnaire focused

on the one open-ended question on CLIL, and we paid attention to the language issues raised by respondents.

### **3. Findings**

From the definition of this strategic mission, which does not assign a specific role to language, it seems that the definition of CLIL is that of “English-medium instruction”, rather than the integration of content and language. However, some awareness of the role of language appears in the explicit mention of assessing students’ language production, although no further guidelines are given apart from the possibility of incorporating a language consultant. Although CLIL in our context is basically interpreted by most people as English (by far the most commonly taught/used language), university policy documents refer to a “third language” (given that this is a bilingual community), thus not excluding other languages. For this reason, the question in the survey explicitly adds Bahasa Indonesia and Japanese Language, which are the other LSP offered at the university.

The content teachers by this language specialist put the theoretical content into practice. Tourism issues included the integration of language and content, derived from a previous team-teaching experience (Cots & Clemente, 2011). The expected language learning outcomes varied greatly across the course syllabi. There was no explicit language content or materials. Similarly, the language content imparted at the beginning of the course was not put into practice in the disciplinary content. In contrast, in the syllabus, there were references to language content/skills related to the discipline, with the explicit course objective of developing both content and language knowledge (“The secondary objective is to improve your use of English as a technical and professional language”).

The role of language in classroom observation paid little attention to language in course descriptions, lecturers’ discourse focused almost exclusively on content, with a few episodes focusing on language usually arising out of lecturers’ (perceived) low proficiency level or from covert/overt comprehension. For example, the lecturers started their lessons by acknowledging their linguistic limitations, which is one of the few references to language. In the extract below, the lecturer made herself available for repairs, reflecting a focus on language as the preview of possible comprehension problems. Moreover, she also admitted that her lack of proficiency and confidence in lecturing in English affected class methodology and contributed to her use of group work.

Hotel and Travel lecturers did not assume a language model role. However, they did aim to encourage students’ English production, stressing that accuracy was not a concern. In contrast, the hospitality lecturers appeared to be less active in language modelling, congruent with their lower proficiency.

This study examines the participants’ views and experiences of CLIL programs. This section discusses the analysis of the transcripts of two sessions with lecturers and students, respectively. The analysis of the lecturers’ focus group discussion yielded the following topics:

- a. the benefits and challenges of CLIL, especially regarding language proficiency;
- b. the role of CLIL versus ESP

Lecturers mentioned the need to learn English as part of their academic careers. In this sense, they welcomed CLIL as an opportunity “to bring English into daily activities”. Motivation to learn English was the reason to engage in CLIL, considering that their participation was voluntary. Incentives would be a rewarding effort through the recognition of more credits, training and support in the preparation of teaching materials.

The language proficiency of both lecturers and students was perceived as the main challenge to CLIL implementation. Lecturers referred to the language demands that CLIL poses on students with quite specific comments. They need both language support and the gradual increase of language demands in CLIL courses (e.g., from reading comprehension questions to giving short presentations). Such comments reflect an awareness of language although, quite paradoxically, the integration of language was hardly made explicit in the classes. It seems that language is seen as a prerequisite for engaging in CLIL. They used the duality ‘language learning’ versus ‘language use’, whereby CLIL is considered an opportunity for authentic language use: “It’s not so much that they [students] learn the language (although they learn technical vocabulary), but that they lose the fear of using the language, that they feel the need to use the language.”

Lecturers referred to CLIL courses as a way for students to practice (discipline-related) English. The presence of ESP in the curriculum (rather than CLIL) is justified by the lack of resources for implementing generalized CLIL programs, which would be a more desirable scenario. No further reasons are given to explain why CLIL is seen as more effective than ESP, although it should be noted that Business English courses are compulsory for all students, while CLIL courses are chosen by a few motivated students who have enrolled voluntarily. From the discussion, it appears that the development of (academic) English proficiency is the result of imparting content courses in English, under the responsibility of content lecturers, while no references are made to ESP courses or the collaboration of language specialists for the integration of language in content courses.

Like lecturers, students also articulated their motivation for taking CLIL courses. Their choice of a CLIL subject stems from their willingness to use English. They showed positive views towards CLIL, expressing language benefits like specific vocabulary/discourse, the development of fluency, and losing their fear of speaking in public.

Students considered that the implementation of CLIL cannot be imposed and that it is a requirement that lecturers be prepared to teach in English, by which they mean that lecturers should exhibit language proficiency. Regarding lecturers’ proficiency, Tourism students believed that the lecturers spoke good English but with an accent. In general, students expected CLIL lecturers to have a higher level of English than the students and anticipated them acting as language models by correcting students, for example. These views coincide with the class observations, in which the lecturer acted as a model and repaired students’ contributions. The student’s general low proficiency levels may lead

to a double barrier for CLIL: the “need to understand English and complex subject matter.”

When reporting on their CLIL experience, students referred to language help with classes prepared to minimize comprehension difficulties. This remark coincides with the classroom data as, for example, the Management thing classes observed included detailed visual support. Services classes mentioned that their lecturer used a combination of materials in Bahasa and English. Students referred to strategies for overcoming language problems, like L1 use, or making definitions for comprehensibility: “when there was a doubt we tried to understand each other, looking for definitions because we couldn’t find the word”. These remarks reflect their awareness that language is a concern. They referred to ESP classes as being hard for students, even though they considered them to be at the same level as English courses at secondary school: “because the ESP course we did in the second year, well, which is almost what we did in secondary school, and people found it difficult, the thing is if we’re doing a university course in English and it’s the same as secondary school, and people find it difficult, how can we move on?” This reference to a generally low proficiency level indicates a major challenge for CLIL implementation on a wide scale. Comparing CLIL and ESP courses, students characterized language courses as grammar, as opposed to the communicative focus of CLIL courses which are related to their discipline and where language mistakes are not penalized. For these students, CLIL would be a way to encourage students to improve their English, which is something that would happen. Thus with CLIL, language demands come from subject-matter communication rather than from a language course.

Another source of data for lecturers’ and students’ perceptions was an open-ended question included in the general questionnaire which asked them to evaluate the introduction of courses taught in English (not language courses, but courses taught in English). This section starts with the demographics of the questionnaire to contextualize the position of CLIL and ESP courses at Polije. This is followed by the qualitative analysis of the open question on CLIL. The lecturers’ and students’ opinions also reveal their concerns about CLIL, which parallel the topics in the focus groups: the relationship between CLIL and ESP; the evaluation of CLIL and ESP experience; and the conditions for CLIL implementation. Although the open question explicitly excluded language courses, some participants referred to ESP, which provided valuable information on the relationship between language and content. These figures confirm that CLIL is a new phenomenon inside ESP.

In general, lecturers’ and students’ answers are positive towards CLIL. Apart from the arguments related to language practice/learning and internationalization, some students considered CLIL as an induction into the discipline. In this sense, one of the views that emerged is a definition of CLIL as a kind of ESP. The prospects of implementing CLIL are embraced with enthusiasm because it is a way of learning the discipline-related language, an area that in principle would be covered by discipline-specific ESP. Largely coinciding with the views expressed in the discussions, lecturers also remarked that CLIL should be favoured instead of ESP, with the argument of ‘learning by doing’, as CLIL is perceived as a context for real communication. On the

other hand, some students argued against implementing CLIL because of students lack of proficiency, which hinders academic performance

The general views above provide insights into how content and language can be approached. More specifically, from the students' reports of their CLIL or ESP experience we can derive considerations for ESP planning and teaching. Some of the students who made evaluative comments about CLIL expressed mixed perceptions of their experience. However, there are a few hints that suggest that language courses at Polije should be adapted. As shown in the students' comments, CLIL is regarded as a context for language learning and real communication in the discipline. As this is an area that one could expect to be covered by ESP, we wondered what views of language classes participants had. These are only incidental comments precisely because the open question explicitly excluded LSP courses. Therefore, in a further study participants should be asked to give a more detailed account of their views of ESP courses in order to find out what initiatives can be undertaken by ESP specialists to promote discipline-specific communication.

As noted above, despite some enthusiastic views on CLIL, other responses are cautious about its implementation, suggesting that certain conditions should be met, like providing language support. The student suggests that a language course should precede content courses taught in English, whereas the lecturer reflects on her ability to teach in English and how it would affect the overall quality of her teaching.

Although university policies mention the role of language and the integration of language and content, there are no specific guidelines or proposals for integrating ESP into this new pedagogical model. This lack of clearly defined policies is reflected in the practices analyzed in this study. Regarding the first research question, the role and status of ESP and CLIL vary across subjects, with some grassroots initiatives for CLIL courses and an unequal presence of ESP courses. The courses observed show a variety of approaches to CLIL, with different levels of inclusion of language support. In the Hotel Management subject, for example, language learning outcomes are basically expected from mere exposure to content lectures. The Law course includes an attempt to integrate ESP into the course, but with a focus on ESP theory and without having sought the collaboration of ESP specialists. On the other hand, the Service subject includes both content courses in English and ESP courses, although they are independently taught by lecturers from different departments. Both are based on the collaboration between a content lecturer and a language specialist and can be classified as adjunct courses with explicit language learning objectives and outcomes.

To answer the second research question, on the role of language in CLIL courses, the documents and classroom observation data are fairly consistent; that is, hardly any language focus was found in the Hotel Management classes, with a course syllabus that did not list language objectives. Therefore, in lectures, the focus was on content, with hardly any focus on language. On the other hand, in the Service class, with a lecturer who felt more confident in his command of English, there were language episodes addressed to overcoming communication breakdowns.

The third research question refers to lecturers' and students' views on the implementation of CLIL. Both focus groups and questionnaires show a certain enthusiasm towards CLIL, perceived as a real communicative context for discipline-oriented language use. This view contrasts with that of ESP courses, which are seen as traditional language courses and not communicative or discipline-based. These views of ESP lead to the question of whether such perceptions respond to stereotyped views of what language teaching is or to the conditions of implementation of CLIL and ESP courses. Although CLIL practices are seen as an opportunity to develop English proficiency, participants also miss the need to strive for accuracy.

From these perceptions, some lessons can be learnt for the reappraisal of ESP courses, such as making them more communicative and disciplined or project-based, so that students feel the need to communicate in English to accomplish meaningful tasks. There is always room for collaboration in language development: from designing ESP/EAP courses adapted to the disciplines to collaborating with content lecturers through to an adjunct model.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although it is only a snapshot of a single institution, the Tourism Department of Polije, the triangulation of different types of data (documents, classes, and participants' perspectives) has yielded a general picture of CLIL practices, which have implications for ESP. This article stresses the importance of language competence for graduates, without providing clear institutional guidelines and support. It also appears contradictory that the ESP in the institution is not exploited or that the expertise of language departments is only exceptionally sought. A systematic approach is necessary to design, implement and assess the 'L' for language in CLIL, for which the collaboration of ESP experts can be valuable. Moreover, further research will be necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of CLIL courses in terms of to which extent the professional values, softskills, and morality can be included into ESP and CLIL courses (Novawan et al., 2017).

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