Navigating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Indonesian Universities: Promise and Pitfalls

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Indonesian higher education, highlighting its benefits and challenges. CLIL is an instructional approach that integrates subject content with a foreign language, aiming to enhance both linguistic competence and academic achievement. While widely adopted in primary and secondary education, its application at the tertiary level presents distinct difficulties that require critical assessment. Using a synthesis research methodology, this study examines 15 empirical studies from reputable academic databases, including ERIC, Scopus, and ProQuest Education Journal. The findings reveal that CLIL improves students' language skills, subject knowledge, and motivation. Additionally, it offers professional development opportunities for educators by refining their English proficiency and pedagogical strategies. However, several obstacles hinder CLIL's effectiveness in Indonesian universities. Students' limited English proficiency affects content comprehension, while a shortage of well-trained instructors poses instructional challenges. Further difficulties arise in integrating content with language instruction and developing appropriate assessment methods. This study emphasizes the necessity of institutional support, teacher training programs, and supplementary language courses to optimize CLIL's benefits and mitigate its challenges. Future research should focus on targeted interventions to enhance its feasibility and sustainability in Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: CLIL; Indonesia; Tertiary Education;

INTRODUCTION

The growing internationalization of higher education has led many Asian countries to adopt English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in an effort to enhance global competitiveness and improve students' access to international knowledge (Dearden, 2015; Macaro et al., 2018). One widely adopted approach that integrates EMI with subject learning is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL is an educational framework that simultaneously promotes language acquisition and subject mastery by using a foreign language as the medium of instruction (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). As an innovative pedagogical strategy, CLIL has been implemented in various educational settings, particularly in Europe and Asia, where English proficiency is regarded as a critical skill for academic and professional success (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Tsuchiya & Pérez Murillo, 2019).

In Indonesia, CLIL has been progressively introduced in primary and secondary education since 2006, particularly in schools designated as "international-standard" institutions (Zein, 2017; Widodo, 2018). However, despite its increasing popularity, the effectiveness of CLIL in non-native English-speaking contexts, including Indonesia, remains a subject of debate (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016; Widhiyanto, 2021). While CLIL has been found to enhance students' language skills and academic performance in some studies (Admiraal, Westhoff, & de Bot, 2006), challenges such as students' limited English proficiency, teachers' insufficient language skills, and a lack of adequate teaching materials persist (Rahman, 2020; Hamied & Malik, 2021). These issues are particularly pronounced in Indonesian higher education, where CLIL implementation remains sporadic and lacks comprehensive policy support (Sulistiyo et al., 2022).

Despite the existing body of research on CLIL in primary and secondary education, there is a limited understanding of how this approach can be effectively integrated into Indonesian higher education. Previous studies have primarily focused on students' and teachers' perceptions of CLIL (Bradford, 2016) or the linguistic demands it places on learners (Evans & Morrison, 2018), but few have examined the institutional readiness, pedagogical strategies, and long-term impact of CLIL at the tertiary level in Indonesia. This gap in research highlights the need for a systematic evaluation of CLIL's feasibility in Indonesian universities, considering both its potential benefits and the significant challenges it may entail.

This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the benefits and challenges of CLIL in Indonesian higher education. Specifically, the study will examine how CLIL affects students' academic performance, motivation, and language development, as well as its implications for teaching practices and institutional policies. The discussion will begin with an analysis of CLIL's advantages, followed by an evaluation of the challenges associated with its implementation, such as the high linguistic demands on students and the availability of qualified educators. Finally, the study will assess the feasibility of adopting CLIL in Indonesian universities and propose recommendations for policymakers and educators seeking to integrate CLIL more effectively in higher education.

METHOD

This study employs a synthesis research methodology, an approach initially introduced by Onwuegbuzie, Leach, and Collins (2017). This method involves synthesizing data from various related empirical studies to construct a comprehensive understanding of the topic. By integrating findings from multiple sources, this approach builds upon existing research to provide a nuanced discussion of CLIL implementation in Indonesian higher education. Since the study relies solely on available related literature, issues concerning validity, reliability, or ethical considerations are not addressed, as the data used is unreactive and poses no harm to human participants (Gray, 2004; Pole & Morrison, 2003).

To gather relevant conceptual and empirical studies, the Monash education library was utilized as the primary digital repository. This library was chosen due to its extensive collection, credibility, and accessibility for researchers. The search process targeted journals specifically related to education, with three main journal providers selected: ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), Scopus, and ProQuest Education Journal. These databases were chosen for their strong reputation and wide coverage of high-quality publications in educational research.

The search for relevant studies was conducted using carefully selected keywords, including "Content and Language Integrated Learning," "CLIL implementation," "challenges

in CLIL," "higher education," and "Indonesia." Boolean operators (e.g., OR, AND, NOT) were applied to refine search results and ensure relevance. After a systematic review of articles retrieved from these databases, a total of 15 studies were identified as directly relevant to the focus of this research. The selection process was guided by the alignment of these articles with the key search terms, allowing for a refined examination of studies specifically addressing the implementation of CLIL in Indonesian higher education.

The selected journal articles underwent a thorough evaluation to assess their quality and relevance. Once identified, these articles were meticulously examined, analyzed, and synthesized to extract meaningful conclusions, provide new insights, and contextualize the findings within the framework of CLIL implementation in Indonesia. By employing a synthesis research methodology alongside a structured and rigorous approach to literature analysis, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the complexities of CLIL adoption, particularly in relation to teacher preparedness, student engagement, and institutional challenges in Indonesian higher education

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Numerous studies conducted in Europe have highlighted the effectiveness of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), supporting the perception that it enhances both language proficiency and subject knowledge. This dual benefit makes CLIL a desirable educational approach for many institutions, particularly in non-English-speaking countries where English is increasingly being used as a medium of instruction. The advantages and challenges of CLIL can be categorized into three main aspects: improved academic performance, increased student motivation, and enhanced teacher proficiency.

Improved Academic Performance

One of the primary reasons for adopting CLIL is its potential to enhance students' language skills and academic achievement. Research has consistently shown that CLIL improves students' vocabulary, listening, and speaking abilities. For example, studies conducted in Spain (Dalton-Puffer, 2011) and Taiwan (Yang, 2015) found that CLIL students demonstrated higher linguistic competence than their non-CLIL peers. This improvement is attributed to the immersive nature of CLIL, where students are exposed to subject content in a foreign language, reinforcing their language acquisition process. Furthermore, CLIL has been linked to improved cognitive flexibility, which enhances students' ability to process complex information in multiple languages (Marsh & Frigols-Martín, 2012). This cognitive advantage is particularly beneficial in today's globalized world, where multilingual competence is increasingly valued in both academic and professional settings.

However, despite these promising findings, some researchers argue that the benefits of CLIL may be temporary. A longitudinal study by Pérez-Cañado (2020) suggests that while students initially exhibit significant gains in language proficiency, these advantages may plateau over time if not reinforced through continuous exposure and practice. This raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of CLIL's linguistic benefits, especially in contexts where students have limited opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom. Additionally, some studies have pointed out methodological limitations in CLIL research, particularly the lack of pre-test assessments in certain studies. Without rigorous baseline data, it is difficult to determine whether CLIL students' improved language proficiency is solely due to CLIL instruction or other factors such as prior exposure to English or differences in student motivation.

Another significant concern is the potential negative impact of CLIL on subjects requiring technical knowledge, such as mathematics and science. Lasagabaster and Doiz

(2016) highlight that a lack of linguistic competence may hinder students' ability to grasp complex concepts, leading to cognitive overload. In technical subjects, precise terminology and conceptual understanding are crucial, and struggling with language comprehension can create additional barriers to learning. In contexts where teacher-centered instruction is dominant, students may also have fewer opportunities for meaningful communication, which contradicts the communicative approach that CLIL is supposed to promote. This challenge underscores the need for careful curriculum design, teacher training, and instructional strategies that support both language and content learning to ensure CLIL's effectiveness across various disciplines.

Increased Student Motivation

CLIL is widely believed to have a positive impact on students' motivation, with research indicating that students in CLIL programs exhibit higher enthusiasm, engagement, and confidence in using the target language. Studies have found that students perceive learning through CLIL as more relevant to their future careers, particularly in countries where English proficiency is an asset in the job market (Dörnyei, 2014; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). The integration of language and content makes learning more meaningful, as students are exposed to real-world applications of language use. When students see the direct relevance of their learning, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, putting in greater effort to master both the subject matter and the language of instruction.

Additionally, the exposure to authentic materials and real-life scenarios in CLIL classrooms enhances students' sense of purpose in language learning, making them more engaged in the learning process. However, other studies suggest that motivation can also be achieved through traditional foreign language classes, making it uncertain whether CLIL is the sole contributor to increased motivation. For instance, Huang (2018) argues that motivation in CLIL settings may be influenced by external factors such as teacher effectiveness, learning environment, and curriculum design rather than the CLIL approach itself. In cases where teachers are highly skilled at fostering interactive and communicative learning environments, motivation levels in non-CLIL classes may be equally high. Furthermore, some studies have questioned whether the initial motivation observed in CLIL programs is sustained over time. Students may experience novelty effects in the early stages of CLIL instruction, but their enthusiasm could wane if they struggle to keep up with the dual demands of language and content learning (Macaro et al., 2018).

Some findings indicate that CLIL may negatively affect students' self-esteem, particularly among those who struggle with both language and content comprehension. A study by Bruton (2015) found that weaker students often experience higher levels of anxiety and frustration in CLIL classrooms, which can lead to lower academic self-concept and disengagement from learning. The additional cognitive load of processing subject content in a second language can be overwhelming for some students, especially if they do not receive adequate language support. This highlights the importance of differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques in CLIL classrooms to ensure that all students, regardless of their proficiency level, can benefit from this instructional approach. Without proper support mechanisms in place, CLIL may unintentionally widen the achievement gap between high-achieving and struggling students, raising concerns about its inclusivity and accessibility.

Enhanced Teacher Proficiency

Beyond student benefits, CLIL has been recognized for its positive impact on teachers' language proficiency. Teaching through CLIL provides educators with opportunities to enhance their spoken English and develop more effective pedagogical strategies for integrating language and content. Research suggests that CLIL lecturers appreciate the

opportunity to improve their communication skills and gain greater confidence in using English in academic settings (Banegas, 2021). This improvement is particularly valuable in non-English-speaking countries, where English proficiency among educators varies. CLIL fosters an environment where teachers are required to use English regularly, leading to increased fluency and accuracy over time. Furthermore, CLIL encourages teachers to adopt a more interactive and communicative teaching style, which benefits not only their language skills but also their ability to engage students in meaningful discussions and critical thinking activities (Pérez-Cañado, 2020).

However, this advantage may be short-lived, as teachers often face greater challenges as they become more deeply involved in CLIL instruction. Unlike traditional subject teaching, CLIL requires educators to manage both content delivery and language-related classroom interactions, making it a complex and demanding task. Many teachers report difficulties in balancing these dual demands, particularly if they have not received adequate training in CLIL pedagogy (Ball, Kelly, & Clegg, 2016). Studies have shown that teachers who lack formal CLIL training may struggle to scaffold learning effectively, resulting in content being oversimplified or language instruction being neglected (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). Moreover, the pressure to teach in a second language can sometimes lead to reduced spontaneity and flexibility in the classroom, as teachers may focus more on language accuracy rather than fostering dynamic, student-centered discussions (Morton, 2013).

Additionally, CLIL instruction can lead to an increased workload and heightened stress among educators, as they must constantly adapt their teaching methods to accommodate students' varying levels of language proficiency. Many teachers express concerns about the additional preparation time required for CLIL lessons, as they must carefully select and modify materials to ensure they are accessible to all learners (Coyle et al., 2010). In some cases, educators report feeling overwhelmed by the expectation to function as both subject experts and language facilitators, especially if they themselves lack advanced English proficiency (Hüttner & Smit, 2014). As a result, teacher burnout can become a significant issue, particularly in contexts where institutional support and professional development opportunities are limited. To address these challenges, ongoing teacher training, mentorship programs, and collaborative teaching approaches are essential for ensuring that CLIL educators receive the support they need to thrive in their dual roles.

Context-Dependent Effectiveness of CLIL

Although CLIL offers promising benefits, it is crucial to recognize that its effectiveness is often highly context-dependent. Research suggests that CLIL's positive outcomes are closely tied to specific educational settings, emphasizing the need for careful consideration before implementation. Factors such as teacher training, curriculum design, institutional support, and students' language proficiency levels all play a crucial role in determining the success of CLIL programs (Nikula et al., 2016). In contexts where teachers receive comprehensive professional development and have access to high-quality teaching materials, CLIL tends to be more effective in achieving both linguistic and content-based learning goals (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Conversely, in settings where these elements are lacking, CLIL may fail to deliver its intended benefits, leading to increased cognitive load for students and instructional difficulties for teachers.

Without adequate planning and support, the potential benefits of CLIL may not be fully realized, and it may even lead to unintended learning challenges for both students and educators. For instance, in countries where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, a lack of sufficient language input may hinder their ability to grasp subject content effectively (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Additionally, studies indicate that when CLIL is

implemented in environments with inadequate teacher training, educators may struggle to balance content instruction with language development, resulting in a superficial understanding of both (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). Institutional factors, such as rigid curricula or standardized assessments, can also limit the flexibility required for CLIL to succeed. In some cases, educators may feel pressured to prioritize content mastery over language development, reducing the interactive and communicative aspects of CLIL that make it effective (Pérez-Cañado, 2020).

To ensure successful CLIL implementation, educational institutions must address these challenges by providing robust teacher training programs, designing curricula that integrate both language and content effectively, and offering ongoing institutional support. Schools and universities should consider adopting a gradual approach to CLIL, where students and teachers receive structured guidance before full-scale implementation. Additionally, collaboration between content and language teachers can help bridge the gap between subject knowledge and linguistic skills, fostering a more cohesive learning experience (Hüttner & Smit, 2014). Policymakers must also consider regional differences, as the feasibility of CLIL varies depending on sociolinguistic contexts and available resources. By acknowledging these complexities, educational stakeholders can make informed decisions about whether CLIL is a suitable approach for their specific learning environments.

Challenges for Students in CLIL Implementation

Despite the advantages of CLIL, its implementation in Indonesian higher education presents significant challenges, particularly for students. While CLIL aims to facilitate language learning alongside academic development, it can also create barriers that hinder student success. One of the primary difficulties is the high level of English proficiency required to engage effectively in CLIL classrooms. Since English serves as both the medium of instruction and the subject of learning, students are expected to comprehend complex academic texts, participate in discussions, and produce well-structured written work—all in a language that may not be their first or even second language (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). This added cognitive load can result in frustration, disengagement, and lower academic performance, especially for students with limited English exposure.

A critical factor contributing to this challenge is the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2000). While many Indonesian students acquire conversational fluency (BICS) in English, they often struggle with the academic language (CALP) required for higher education success. This gap makes it difficult for students to process subject-specific concepts, understand lectures, and engage in analytical discussions. Research has shown that students in CLIL settings who lack adequate CALP often resort to rote memorization rather than developing critical thinking skills, which undermines the intended benefits of the approach (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Additionally, many textbooks and academic materials used in CLIL courses are designed for native or near-native English speakers, further widening the comprehension gap for Indonesian students.

To address these linguistic challenges, some researchers advocate for integrating English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses as supplementary support (Gierlinger, 2015). These courses aim to strengthen students' academic writing, reading, and speaking skills, helping them cope with the linguistic demands of CLIL instruction. However, this raises an important question: if students require additional language support to succeed in CLIL programs, does CLIL itself significantly contribute to language development, or does the improvement come primarily from supplementary courses? Studies have suggested that CLIL alone does not always lead to sustained language growth (Pérez-Cañado, 2020), indicating

that its success in higher education may be more dependent on external interventions than the approach itself.

Challenges for Teachers in CLIL Implementation

The successful implementation of CLIL in higher education depends not only on students but also on teachers, who face multiple challenges in adapting to this approach. In many Asian countries, including Indonesia, the shortage of qualified CLIL instructors is a pressing concern (Ball, Kelly, & Clegg, 2016). Teaching in a CLIL environment requires expertise in both subject content and language, making it a demanding role for educators. However, research suggests that many university lecturers in Indonesia lack the English proficiency necessary for effective CLIL instruction (Kirkpatrick, 2017). This deficiency affects the clarity and quality of content delivery, leaving students confused and disengaged. Furthermore, students often report dissatisfaction with their lecturers' English skills, while teachers themselves acknowledge their struggles with expressing complex academic concepts in English.

In addition to language proficiency, pedagogical adaptation poses another major challenge. Effective CLIL teaching requires a shift from traditional lecture-based instruction to interactive, student-centered learning methods (Coyle et al., 2010). However, many educators, especially those trained in conventional teaching approaches, struggle to incorporate these strategies into their CLIL classrooms. Studies indicate that some instructors fail to integrate language and content effectively, treating CLIL as a direct translation exercise rather than an immersive learning experience (Morton, 2013). This issue is particularly pronounced in technical fields such as science and engineering, where subject-specific jargon and abstract concepts make content delivery in a foreign language even more complex. Without proper training in CLIL pedagogy, teachers may default to passive instruction, limiting students' opportunities for meaningful interaction in English.

To mitigate these difficulties, collaborative teaching has been proposed as a solution, where content teachers work alongside language specialists to ensure both content and linguistic clarity (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2013). This approach allows subject matter experts to focus on their disciplines while language instructors provide linguistic scaffolding to support comprehension. However, implementing collaborative teaching requires a high level of coordination, shared planning, and institutional commitment, which are often lacking in higher education institutions. Additionally, teachers frequently express concerns about increased workload and role ambiguity in team-teaching models, further complicating the feasibility of this strategy in real-world settings.

Assessment Challenges in CLIL

Another significant obstacle in CLIL implementation is assessment. Unlike traditional instruction, where grading criteria are well-established, CLIL requires a dual focus on content mastery and language development, which complicates evaluation methods. Many teachers struggle with determining the extent to which students should be assessed on their language use versus their understanding of the subject matter (Nikula et al., 2016). Research has shown that some CLIL instructors neglect language assessment entirely, prioritizing content knowledge to align with university grading policies (Pérez-Cañado, 2020). This creates an imbalance, as students who perform well in content knowledge but lack linguistic accuracy may still receive high grades, undermining the intended goal of CLIL to improve both subject expertise and language proficiency.

Additionally, the lack of standardized CLIL assessment frameworks in Indonesia exacerbates this challenge. While European CLIL programs benefit from well-developed guidelines such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR),

Indonesian universities have yet to establish clear benchmarks for evaluating both content and language within CLIL courses (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). As a result, grading practices vary widely between institutions and even between instructors, leading to inconsistencies in student evaluation. Furthermore, research indicates that many teachers feel ill-equipped to design assessments that effectively measure students' progress in both areas, highlighting the urgent need for professional development in this aspect of CLIL implementation (Ball et al., 2016).

To overcome these issues, experts recommend implementing a balanced assessment approach that incorporates both formative and summative evaluation methods (Gierlinger, 2015). Formative assessments, such as presentations, reflective journals, and peer feedback, can help students develop their academic language skills throughout the course. Meanwhile, summative assessments should integrate language criteria alongside content evaluation to ensure a more comprehensive measure of student performance. Universities must also provide CLIL-specific assessment training for educators to enhance their ability to evaluate students effectively. Without these measures, the inconsistency and ambiguity surrounding CLIL assessment may continue to hinder its success in Indonesian higher education.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of CLIL in Indonesian higher education requires careful consideration due to the numerous challenges it presents. While CLIL offers potential benefits in terms of language acquisition and academic performance, these advantages must be weighed against the difficulties students and teachers may encounter. Students' insufficient English proficiency can hinder their academic success, while teachers face significant obstacles in meeting language and pedagogical requirements. Without adequate support and preparation, CLIL implementation may not yield the expected positive outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to critically evaluate the feasibility of CLIL in Indonesian universities before its widespread adoption.

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