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**CONTENT AND LANGUAGE**

**INTEGRATED LEARNING: TEACHING L2 AT UNIVERSITIES  
THROUGH STUDENTS' MAJOR**

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INTEGRATED LEARNING: TEACHING L2 AT UNIVERSITIES THROUGH STUDENTS' MAJOR

## EL APRENDIZAJE INTEGRADO DE CONTENIDOS Y LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS: ENSEÑANZA DE L2 EN LAS UNIVERSIDADES A TRAVÉS DE LAS CARRERAS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES

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### ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an approach in which content is delivered through a second language, becoming a tool to deliver information. This paper evaluated the viability of implementing CLIL at Universidad Católica de Cuenca Language Center. This research also explored university students' perception of studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the university level. After implementing the CLIL approach, this paper described the effect on students' speaking skills. A placement speaking test was applied at the beginning of the 8-week course and another at the end. A Survey was applied to find topics of interest from students' majors, reasons for taking English classes, how they feel when using English to communicate, and motivation. This study used two Intermediate 2 (B1) in the period October-December 2022. One group (control group) received regular classes following the official curriculum, and the other group (experimental group) had the intervention of CLIL. The findings provided valuable information on whether an intervention of CLIL with university students who take EFL as a requirement to graduate from their undergraduate program is viable. The results of this study offered information about the impact of CLIL not only on English proficiency but also on the motivation toward L2 and cooperative learning.

### Keywords:

Teaching method (CLIL), foreign language, standards, skills.

### RESUMEN

El Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (AICLE) es un enfoque en el que el contenido se enseña a través de un segundo idioma, convirtiéndose en una herramienta para transmitir información. Este trabajo evaluó la viabilidad de implementar AICLE en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca. Esta investigación también exploró la percepción de los estudiantes universitarios de estudiar inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) a nivel universitario. Después de implementar el enfoque AICLE, este documento describe el efecto en las habilidades orales de los estudiantes. Se aplicó una prueba de ubicación oral al comienzo del curso de 8 semanas y otra al final. Se aplicó una Encuesta para encontrar temas de interés de las carreras de los estudiantes, razones para tomar clases de inglés, cómo se sienten al usar el inglés para comunicarse y motivación. Este estudio utilizó dos niveles Intermediate 2 (B1) en el periodo octubre-diciembre 2022. Un grupo (grupo control) recibió clases regulares siguiendo el currículo oficial, y el otro grupo (grupo experimental) tuvo la intervención de AICLE. Los hallazgos proporcionaron información valiosa sobre si es viable una intervención de CLIL con estudiantes universitarios que toman EFL como requisito para graduarse de su programa de pregrado. Los resultados del presente estudio brindaron información sobre el impacto de AICLE no solo en el dominio del inglés sino también en la motivación hacia la L2 y el aprendizaje cooperativo.

### Palabras clave:

Método de enseñanza (CLIL), idioma extranjero, normas, habilidades.

## INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language has become a worldwide necessity not only to travel but also as a requirement to graduate from university, and obtain better job opportunities. Being proficient in English as a second language is fundamental to have access to more and better possibilities (González et al., 2022). This is equally true in Ecuador. University students are asked to demonstrate B1 proficiency to finish undergraduate studies (Ecuador. Consejo de Educación Superior, 2017). However, the teachers' conception of the class remains the same, focusing on grammar presented in a book and using the context presented instead of finding a different approach. Hence, students get more exposure to the target language as they only use English in classrooms. Language is considered a social practice that takes place in a social context; therefore, it cannot be considered in isolation (Lasagabaster, 2022).

Using content from other disciplines in language courses is not new teaching approach that is defined as an additional language integrated into a non-language subject (Coyle et al., 2010). There is an increasing number of schools implementing CLIL (Lopes, 2020). Nowadays, teachers do not talk about teaching English but teaching through English (Huilcapi et al., 2021). Its implementation has proven to benefit students in specific settings. Research outcomes in this field are mainly positive, and indicate higher L2 levels for CLIL compared to traditional language classes (Dalton-Puffer, 2008). The problem arises when teachers know the existence of the concept but lack expertise when applying CLIL (Banegas & Beamud, 2020). Teachers should be trained to implement content from different academic units through projects or similar activities, where students can learn and the class focuses on interaction and following a communicative approach (Corrales & Maloof, 2009) instead of the typical grammar-centered classes.

Content offers the concepts, and language is the means through which that information is acquired, conveyed, and used (Corrales & Maloof, 2009). It has to be considered that having proficiency in a language means being able to talk about any situation, not only the ones presented in a textbook. For this reason, teachers need more training on the CLIL approach and the tools to implement it (Banegas et al., 2020).

This study aims to go through students' needs and interests to create meaningful content and practice, and evaluate the implementation of a program based on CLIL. By incorporating the knowledge students bring from their faculties to the Language Center at Universidad Católica de Cuenca, teachers only need to create activities following the four C's (critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication) curriculum (Coyle, 1999). Therefore, L2 becomes a tool to communicate, and guarantees familiar topics through which learners can interact. Collaboration among students from different majors may enrich the

interaction in the classroom, and make students confident to participate, as they know what they are talking about.

This mixed methods study examines the viability of implementing CLIL in the Language Center of Universidad Católica de Cuenca. To analyze the effect of CLIL upon the acquisition of L2, a standardized speaking test was applied at different stages, as well as surveys to determine the before and after speaking proficiency of the participants. The speaking tests provided information based on the grades obtained, and the surveys showed how they felt after participating in a CLIL-based program as well as their perception towards L2 learning at the university level.

The theoretical structure of this study includes the following domains: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Meaningful Input, Affective filter, Acquisition-learning, and Cooperative learning, fundamental areas to implement a CLIL-based course for English students at the Language Center of Universidad Católica de Cuenca.

CLIL is a pedagogical method which combines teaching subjects with learning a foreign language in the classroom. The goal is to enhance both language proficiency and subject comprehension by using L2 as the primary mode of instruction. It can be applied to subjects like science, history, geography, and more, to make language learning more relevant and meaningful for students. The essence of CLIL is that content subjects are taught in a language different to the learners' first language (Darn, 2006). This approach has been studied by the author Arnold Wentzel, who concluded that CLIL can help the integrated learning of both content and language when executed correctly. Another factor is teamwork and cooperation among students, which are also vital components at any given educational institution (McDougald, 2015). The last factor to be considered is intensity, as it influences the CLIL programs' results. Studies have shown that higher-intensity CLIL programs, where more time is dedicated to language and content learning, tend to have better results in terms of language proficiency and content knowledge acquisition. Merino & Lasagabaster (2017), found that longer and more intensive CLIL programs were associated with higher language proficiency gains, particularly in speaking skills. Nevertheless, it's necessary to note that the optimal intensity level may change depending on the specific context and needs of the learners.

Krashen's input hypothesis describes how learners acquire a second language. This hypothesis is concerned with the acquisition and states that learners improve and make progress when exposed to "Comprehensible Input" which correspond to level "i+1", where i means current competence, to i + 1, where 1 stands for the next level (Krashen, 1982). This type of input gives the learner chances to use the language communicatively and with a clear purpose, thus supporting their language growth and enhancing their understanding of the language and its use.

Meaningful input is not limited to understanding individual words or phrases but also encompasses the overall message or text comprehension. Consequently, teachers and language programs must provide materials and activities that are engaging and purposeful to support learners' motivation and language acquisition.

The Affective Filter hypothesis declares how affective factors affect the second language acquisition process. It also confirms that various affective variables connected to success in second language acquisition can be set into three categories: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. It also illustrates how those learners whose attitudes are not ideal for second language acquisition will have a stronger Affective Filter than those with more conducive attitudes (Krashen, 1982). In other words, it is considered a psychological barrier that can either help or hinder language acquisition based on the learner's emotional state, drive, self-esteem, and other emotional factors. A high affective filter, caused by factors such as nervousness, lack of motivation, or negative attitudes, can hinder language learning by stopping the learner from absorbing and retaining new language information effectively. On the other hand, a low affective filter, characterized by high motivation, self-assurance, and positive attitudes, can support language learning by creating a favorable learning environment for the learner.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis is a theory proposed by Krashen (1982), to explain how second languages are acquired. It claims that adults have two noticeable and independent ways of developing skills in a second language.

The first way is language *acquisition*, a process that is similar to the way children develop skills in their first language. On the other hand, language learning is the other process to expand competence in a second language. The term "learning" will be used hereon to refer to conscious knowledge of L2 (Krashen, 1982). The theory posits that acquisition is the more essential and primary process for acquiring a second language, and that learning can aid in the process. The acquisition takes place through exposure and interaction and is implicit, while learning is an explicit process that involves formal teaching and the examination of language elements.

Overall, the acquisition-learning hypothesis emphasizes the importance of naturalistic and meaningful exposure to a second language, and highlights the fact that learning a language should not be relied upon exclusively as a means of acquiring a second language.

Johnson & Johnson (2013), states that cooperation is the foundation of the theory and practice of cooperative learning. They frame the five essential elements of cooperative learning, which are: positive interdependence, individual *accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing.* "Cooperative learning

*techniques allow EFL learners to actively participate in the language classroom, working together to achieve learning potentials not reachable by merely studying alone. More than just being a way of learning language vocabulary and forms for future exam use, classroom activities allow learners to use their different understandings of how the world operates, leading to stronger personal ties between group members, more well-defined individual identities, and a greater sense of membership in the learning community"* (Apple, 2006, p.20)

Students are encouraged to collaborate, exchange ideas and information, and be responsible for their own and their group's progress. This approach is beneficial in language learning as it provides a chance for linguistic interaction and immediate feedback, leading to increased motivation and improved academic outcomes.

University students in Ecuador are required to demonstrate B1 sufficiency in L2 to graduate from university (Ecuador. Consejo de Educación Superior, 2017). They can either take English courses or present a certification that proves their proficiency. However, considering that they need to dedicate most of their time to studying degree subjects, coming to take English classes, as it is a compulsory subject required to graduate, represents additional hours of studying. Usually, students come to the Language Center only when it is strictly necessary. For all of this, it is vital to create classes that attract students to come earlier, rather than waiting until the end of their studies.

Cross-curricular content has long been used in L2 teaching as a means of reinforcing content from different subjects. CLIL plays a leading role in promoting critical thinking skills among language learners (Aravind & Rajasekaran, 2018). Nevertheless, while it may seem implicit that teachers from different levels should be trained to deliver CLIL lessons without inconvenience, the reality is often different. In CLIL, the use of additional language can make teaching and learning more engaging and cognitively challenging (Garton & Copland, 2019).

In a study about CLIL in Pre-service Teacher Education Banegas & Beamud (2020), describes how two CLIL teacher, set in two different countries, recognize and assembled CLIL courses to meet different contextual demands in initial English language teacher education. They incite CLIL teacher educators to analyze their practices across settings through (auto) ethnography to come up with detailed and honest descriptions of challenges, successes, and failures in CLIL research and preparation. Educational Practice generally requires good teaching and learning practices (Marsh, 2012). As language teachers may choose to teach subjects in CLIL or may be asked to do so, they need confidence about their knowledge and skills related to the subject to be taught (University of Cambridge, 2011).

According to Merino & Lasagabaster (2017), the more intensive students are exposed to CLIL, the better their command turns out to be. This is evident when students get more sessions of CLIL lessons per week. Moreover, the students with more intensive programs benefit the most. The authors concluded that these results were the result of their greater exposure to FL as an instrumental language (Merino & Lasagabaster, 2017). Interactions in CLIL classrooms seem to rely mainly on an informal register which may be due to the natural way language is used (Fajardo Dack et al., 2019).

A revision of CLIL in Latin America from 2008 to 2018 found limited empirical research and a small number of published works. Nevertheless, it concluded that CLIL is principally language-driven in Latin America and more frequent in private education with learners with high proficiency in English but, more teacher preparation is still necessary (Banegas et al., 2020). Another issue is the lack of proficiency in Pre-Service EFL Teaching programs that are not preparing students for the development of language proficiency properly (Argudo et al., 2018).

CLIL research and practice should be encouraged to achieve a more solid and more sustainable harmony between them. The issues raised on research not well performed or yet to be welcome may develop into an opportunity for expanding the frontiers of research and practice on CLIL, and maybe, put forward indigenous models of integrating content and language learning for/from South America (Banegas, 2021) where the usefulness for implementing this approach and different aspects of language development could be examined (Fajardo Dack et al., 2019).

Almost all the references reviewed for this research show a lack of studies regarding CLIL and suggest that teachers need more training during their Pre-professional studies and while practicing the profession. From experience, the implementation of CLIL is more frequent in private institutions where students are used to traveling abroad and usually take extra English classes at private institutions, resulting in superior proficiency in L2. Although public schools have an EFL curriculum, it is not always respected as English teachers have overcrowded classes and different levels, making it challenging to prepare lessons that focus on CLIL.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research, I used both quantitative and qualitative methods following an embedded design as it helped me collect the necessary data and make a proper analysis depending on the information gathered. A questionnaire was designed, and then tested and approved by a university expert. The speaking questionnaire applied at the beginning of the course determine the students' speaking proficiency in L2 as well as a survey evaluate their motivation toward learning the language. Initially, the questionnaire

and survey were applied to the speaking component from CEPT. The information modified the curriculum to intervene in the experimental group. Finally, the second speaking test showed the results of the study.

This research used two Intermediate 2 (B1) groups at the Language Center of Universidad Católica de Cuenca. A total of 45 students were registered. One group (control group, 27 students) received regular classes following the official curriculum, and the other group (experimental group, 18 students) had the intervention of CLIL. Adaptations during the process were necessary, but the research provided valuable information on whether an intervention of CLIL with university students who take EFL as a requirement to graduate from their undergraduate program is viable, given the current context.

The measuring instrument used was a digital survey in Microsoft Form with 6 questions (Q), two of them were opened-ended questions and four were multiple choice. The survey's content was organized into three sections: general information (questions 1 to 2), an overview of CLIL (question 3), and perceptions about learning L2 (questions 4 to 6). This instrument was sent to the students in the experimental group by email to be answered at home and lower the anxiety of responding face-to-face in class. The survey was created based on the needs of the research to find information about reasons to take English, how they feel when using the language, and motivation, among others.

Initially, all participants were informed about the study's objective, and signed a written consent specifying that all audio recordings would be used only by the researcher. The students were made aware that the intervention would not negatively affect their goal of completing their English program.

A speaking placement test was then administered to both groups to assess their English proficiency in L2 and establish a starting point. For this test, a sample speaking test provided by Cambridge was used, along with its rubric (Provided by Cambridge as our Platinum Partner Agreement). This test evaluated fluency, content, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and pronunciation to identify the weakness and strengths of the groups.

Additionally, a survey was conducted to determine the students' fields of study, their motivation for learning EFL, and the level of importance attached to it. Interviews with the students were also conducted to contrast the information collected in the survey and go deeper into the information analysis. The survey and the interview responses provided valuable insights into what motivated students to take the English course and their expectations.

The classes were mainly taught following a communicative approach which included topics that were obtained through interviews and surveys. As part of the final exam, a second speaking test of similar complexity was



administered to compare the results obtained before and after the CLIL intervention. To analyze the speaking components of both tests, Excel was used for quantitative data analysis, while qualitative data analysis was performed using OTTER to transcribe the speaking recordings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the first part of the survey, general information (questions 1 to 2), these are the results (Figure 1):

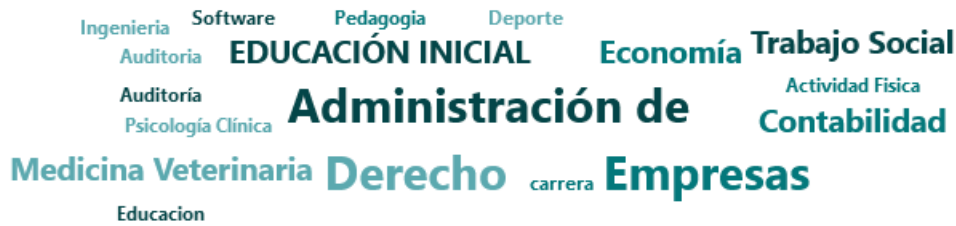


Figure 1. What career are you currently studying at Universidad Católica de Cuenca.

Regarding education preferences, the study has 18 students from different college subjects: 16.6% of the students follow Business Administration, 16.6% Law, 11.1% Accounting and Auditing, 11.1% Economy, 11.1% Primary Education, 11.1% Veterinary, 5.5% Software Engineering, 5.5% Physical Education, 5.5% Clinical Psychology, and 5.5% Social Work.



Figure 2. Which are the most relevant topics you have studied in the last semester of your career?

Regarding figure 2, the most relevant topics the students have recently studied, the survey showed the following: Accounting of Financial Institutions, Local Development, Group Intervention, Criminal Law, Ethics and Organizational Behavior, Financial Mathematics, Macroeconomics and Microeconomics, and Writing Scientific Texts. It provides valuable insights into how language courses could be designed to better meet the needs and preferences of students. Merino & Lasagabaster (2017), state that by incorporating relevant topics into the curriculum, the study would be more meaningful.

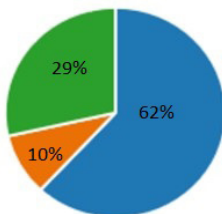


Figure 3. Do you consider that the content studied in your career would allow you to develop your speaking skills when taking English classes?

From the second part of the survey, the overview of CLIL (figure 3), the students were asked if the contents studied in their careers would help them develop their speaking skills in English classes, 62% considered yes, 29% were not sure, and 10% expressed it would not improve their speaking skills.

These results suggest that the majority of students believe that using content related to their field of study would be beneficial for improving their speaking skills in English classes (Wentzel, 2021). This could have implications for the design of English courses, as incorporating relevant content into language instruction could make the language learning experience more engaging and relevant for students. The fact that almost one-third of students were unsure about the

potential benefits of using content from their field of the study suggests that more research and information-sharing could be useful to help students understand the potential benefits of this approach. Finally, the small percentage of students who expressed doubt about the benefits of incorporating content from their field of study highlights the need to explore different approaches to language learning and tailor instruction to the needs and preferences of individual students.

From the third part of the survey, perceptions about learning L2 (figures 4, 5 and 6), these are the most relevant results:

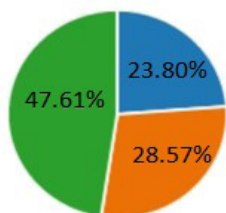


Figure 4. How do you feel when you speak in English?

47.61% found it difficult to communicate in English, 28.57% could communicate but found it difficult to coordinate the ideas, and 23.80% could express ideas correctly.

These results suggest that the majority of students find it difficult to communicate in English or coordinate ideas when speaking in L2. Only, less than a quarter of students considers being able to use the language orally. This could prevent students from interacting due to facts such as shyness, stress, fear of making mistakes, among others. This could use be considered when developing class activities, as the language Center offer high intensity courses which benefits speaking skills when using CLIL (Merino & Lasagabaster, 2017). Regarding the small percentage who feels confident using the language, they can help during the cooperative learning.

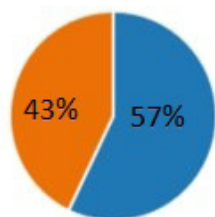


Figure 5. What reason do you have to study English?

57% of students stated they were studying English, as it is a requirement to graduate from university whereas 43% of students needed English to graduate but also liked studying the language. These results show that, although 43 % of students like studying English, the main reason to come to classes is because it is required in order to graduate from university (Ecuador. Consejo de Educación Superior, 2017). Considering subjects and knowledge

from students' majors would increase motivation towards the language indirectly.

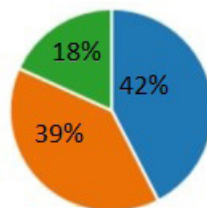


Figure 6. How do you think English would be beneficial for you?

42% of students claimed that studying English would give them more job opportunities, 39% could use it to continue their studies, and 18% could use L2 for migration and travel. These results reveal that the majority of students are aware that speaking a second language would be useful to get better job opportunities. On the other hand, some students find it necessary in order to continue studying, while a small percentage only see the use of English to travel or live abroad. Nonetheless, the students who find English only suitable for migration and travel purposes will find CLIL approach beneficial as it would help them improve their speaking skills (Wentzel, 2021).

Pre and Post standardize speaking tests. (Cambridge CEPT)

At the end of the course, students demonstrated more confidence while interacting in the speaking test. The result of every component evaluated in the speaking test increased (Figure 7 and 8) (Table 1).

PRE-TEST						Total
Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Pragmatic	Communicative	Comprehension	
4	4	5	4	4	4	21
1	1	1	1	1	1	5
3	3	3	4	3	3	16
3	3	3	4	4	4	17
3	3	3	3	3	3	15
1	1	2	2	1	1	7
5	5	4	5	5	5	24
3	3	3	3	3	3	15
1	1	1	1	1	1	5
2	2	3	2	2	2	11
3	3	3	4	4	4	17
5	5	5	5	5	5	25
2	2	2	2	1	1	9
5	5	5	5	5	5	25
3	3	2	3	2	2	13
2	2	2	2	2	2	10
4	4	4	4	5	5	21
1	1	1	1	1	1	5
2.83333	2.83333	2.88889	3.05556	2.88889	2.88889	14.5

Figure 7. Post-Test.

POST-TEST						
Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Pronunciation	Communication	Total	
4	4	4	4	4	4	20
4	3	3	3	3	3	16
3	3	3	3	4	4	17
3	4	3	3	4	4	17
4	4	4	4	4	4	20
4	4	4	4	4	4	20
5	5	5	5	5	5	25
5	4	4	4	4	4	21
2	3	2	3	3	3	13
4	4	4	3	4	4	19
4	4	5	5	5	5	23
5	5	4	4	4	4	22
3	3	3	3	3	3	15
5	5	5	5	5	5	25
3	3	3	3	3	3	15
5	5	5	5	5	5	25
5	5	5	4	5	5	24
4	3	3	3	3	3	16
4	3.94444	3.83333	3.83333	4	4	19.6111

Figure 8. Post-Test.

Table 1. Results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test.

Component	Pre-test	Post-test	Increase	Decrease
Vocabulary	2.833333	4	1.166667 (23.40%)	X
Grammar	2.833333	3.944444	1.111111 (22.20%)	X
Fluency	2.888889	3.833333	0.944444 (19%)	X
Pronunciation	3.055556	3.833333	0.777777 (15.6)	X
Communication	2.888889	4	1.111111 (22.40)	X
Total	14.5	19.61111	5.111111 (20.44)	X

Based on the analysis of the results, it appears that there was an overall improvement in language proficiency from pre-test to post-test, with a total increase of 5.11 points or 20.44%. Specifically, there were improvements in vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and communication skills. The largest improvement was in communication skills with an increase of 1.11 points or 22.40%. The smallest improvement was in pronunciation with an increase of 0.78 points or 15.6%. It's worth noting that there were no decreases in any of the language components. Overall, these results suggest that the intervention had a positive impact on the students' language proficiency.

The present study will provide future researchers with material about the effect of CLIL in intensive courses at the university level. It will provide valuable insights to be considered when creating programs and syllabi. Additionally, it is intended to provide valuable information on whether an intervention of CLIL with university students who take EFL as a requirement to graduate from their undergraduate program, is viable given the current context. The results of this study will offer information about the impact of CLIL not only on English proficiency but also on motivation toward L2 and cooperative learning.

In addition, the results of the study may be useful for program coordinators, and language instructors who are responsible for designing and implementing language courses. The information gained from this study can help them to create more effective and efficient language courses, and make language learning more engaging and enjoyable for students. Furthermore, the study can contribute to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of CLIL in language learning, and provide insight into the suitability of CLIL in university-level language education.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the viability of implementing CLIL in the Language Center of Universidad Católica de Cuenca as well as explore students' perception toward the study of ESL at the university level. Although



the majority of students claim they take English classes as a requirement to graduate from university, 62% of them agree that using content studied in their careers would help them improve their speaking skills in L2. Unfortunately, it was not possible to apply Hard CLIL as students who take English at the Language Center come from different faculties making it difficult to create a syllabus that fits all students. Nonetheless, a Soft CLIL where students collaborate bringing up knowledge and skills proves to be effective to develop oral communication. The speaking post-test showed an increase in students' overall performance. As expected, the indicators that were affected the most were vocabulary, grammar, and communication, which increased by 23.4%, 22.2%, and 22.4% respectively.

Although this paper is limited to just one small group, it may offer important insight for university teachers. It is my recommendation to replicate this experience in bigger groups, and if possible, other universities. Applying a Hard CLIL with a mixed group at a Language Center with students from different faculties is quite hard work. On the other hand, a Soft CLIL approach is very doable. It lowers not only the affective filter but also makes students feel more confident and engaged.

This investigation reveals that there is a positive impact on students' speaking skills after implementing CLIL. On this basis, future research should examine not only this approach at B1.2 level but from A2.1. Students should have the opportunity to use the language to communicate more efficiently when solving tasks. Teachers should start formulating activities that allow learners at the university level to use the knowledge and skills they bring with them in order to increase their motivation and free use of L2.

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