

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WITHIN CLIL INSTRUCTION

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Abstract. *In an increasingly interconnected world, developing intercultural competence has become a central objective of education systems preparing students for global citizenship. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a methodology that combines the teaching of subject matter with a foreign language that provides fertile ground for cultivating the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective intercultural interaction.*

This paper explores the role of CLIL in fostering intercultural competence, analyzes strategies for integration within classroom practice, and examines its benefits and challenges. It draws on established theoretical models and practical classroom approaches, offering recommendations for educators aiming to enhance intercultural learning outcomes.

Key words: CLIL, intercultural education, intercultural competence, language learning

JEL: I21, I23, Z13

Introduction

A modern classroom is no longer isolated from global currents. Advances in technology, increasing mobility, and transnational collaboration mean that students are more likely than ever to work, study, and live in multicultural environments. In this context, the traditional aim of foreign language learning - achieving communicative competence - has evolved into the more complex goal of intercultural communicative competence (Deardorff, 2006).

By learning content through a foreign language, students access authentic sources, encounter alternative perspectives, and experience varied communicative norms. This dual approach supports the development of linguistic skills while also fostering curiosity, empathy, and cultural adaptability - key elements of intercultural competence.

Intercultural Competence in Education and CLIL

CLIL, which merges the teaching of subject content and foreign languages, naturally integrates exposure to different cultural frameworks. Within the CLIL classroom, the **language** acts as a bridge to intercultural understanding. Students do not simply learn to communicate in another language; they learn through that language about other communities, communication styles, and cultural norms. Teachers can therefore design tasks that encourage learners to compare, reflect, and critically evaluate different **context and perspectives**, for example, by examining how cultural attitudes influence economic behavior, management practices, or environmental policies.

Intercultural competence is multifaceted. While definitions vary, many draw from Byram's (1997) influential model, which identifies five key components:

Attitudes encompass openness towards other cultures, curiosity about diversity, and readiness to suspend judgment. In the classroom, this may mean encouraging students to see unfamiliar practices not as “strange” or “wrong” but as alternative solutions shaped by different historical and social contexts. CLIL lessons can nurture these attitudes by making cultural diversity a recurring theme, not an occasional “special topic.”

Knowledge includes awareness of cultural norms, societal structures, traditions, and history—both of one’s own and others’ cultures. In CLIL contexts, subject content often inherently carries cultural information: for example, studying environmental science through English may involve examining UK or US policy debates, which in turn reflect cultural values about nature, economics, and governance.

When it comes to understanding and connecting with other cultures, there are a few key skills involved. First, there's the ability to **interpret and relate** cultural stuff. This means you can look at things like written materials, pictures, or even how people act in another culture and then figure out how they compare to your own experiences. For example, in a CLIL class, students might compare how business is done in Germany to what's normal here, which helps them get better at this.

Then there are skills for **discovering and interacting**. This is all about picking up new cultural insights and then being able to use them when you're actually talking to people. It requires being flexible, really listening to what others are saying, and knowing how to handle it when things get a bit confusing. CLIL classes often use things like role-playing or chatting with students from other countries online to give kids a chance to try this out in a controlled environment.

Finally, there's **critical cultural awareness**. This is about taking a good, hard look at the assumptions we make about cultures, including our own, and understanding how things like society and politics influence our viewpoints. CLIL lessons can help with this by having students write about their thoughts or debate topics where they analyze how different media portray a big world event from a cultural standpoint.

The figure 1 shows how CLIL ties together learning languages and subjects with these different aspects of being culturally competent.



Figure 1. CLIL and intercultural Competence Components

Source: Created by the author in base BYRAM

To really thrive and get things done when you're dealing with different cultures, people need a set of skills. One big part of that is what's called **Cultural Intelligence**, or CQ for short. It's a pretty complex and always-changing idea, but it's become super important for navigating today's world. Ang and the team figured out there are four main parts to CQ, along with smaller pieces within each. You can get a look at what they found in figure 2. (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

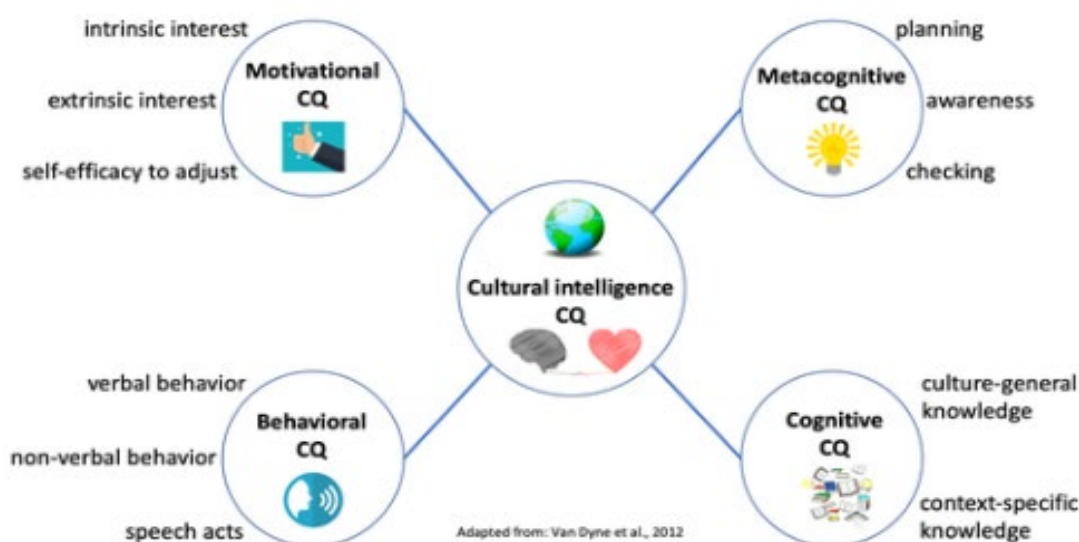


Figure 2. Main Components of Cultural Intelligence

Source: Van Dyne et al (2012)

Being motivated to learn and perform well in different cultures is called motivational CQ. If you have high motivational CQ, you're probably more interested in and sure of your ability to deal with situations involving different cultures.

Cognitive CQ refers to the general knowledge people have about different cultures. We can easily find this information using tools like Google. There are two kinds of knowledge that help with cross-cultural success: what's specific to a particular culture and what's general to many cultures.

Metacognitive CQ is a person's mental ability to pick up and assess cultural information. People who score high in metacognitive CQ are more self-aware, observant of others, and aware of their surroundings. They also monitor and adjust their judgments based on their experiences with different cultures.

Behavioral CQ is the ability to use what you know and show a variety of verbal and nonverbal actions that fit a particular culture. People with high behavioral CQ are seen as more polite and effective communicators because they can change what they say, how they say it, and their communication style.

Additionally, the CLIL teaching method, which focuses on both content and language, promotes communication and teamwork, much like how we interact in real-world situations with people from different cultures. For instance, when students talk about history in English, they have to deal with not just the words and grammar, but also different ways of understanding historical events. These situations are great for developing intercultural skills.

CLIL as a Platform for Intercultural Learning

CLIL's strength lies in its authenticity. Because content is delivered in a foreign language, learners are often exposed to genuine materials - textbooks, videos, articles - that originate in other cultures. This means they are not just learning “about” the culture but are encountering it in the same way native speakers do.

Using authentic, culturally diverse materials; fostering collaboration and diverse group work; encouraging active listening and empathy; and establishing connections with external communities and global viewpoints are some strategies to enhance intercultural competence in CLIL. Through language and content, these approaches assist students in developing the critical thinking and communication abilities necessary for a multicultural society.

Intercultural competence is not an add-on in CLIL - it's integral to learning content and in specific context.

Teachers should design tasks that go beyond knowledge, inviting empathy, critical thinking, and dialogue.

A culturally enriched CLIL classroom prepares students for global mobility, professional communication, and responsible citizenship. Below you can find some of the strategies to develop intercultural competence in CLIL

Integrating Cultural Content into Subject Lessons (economics)

Teachers can select topics that naturally invite cross-cultural comparison. For example:

Consumer Behavior Across Cultures focuses on how culture influences buying habits and brand perception. Students analyze how cultural values (individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, etc.) affect consumer preferences in countries like Japan, the USA, and Moldova.

Advertising and Cultural Identity is about the influence of culture on marketing messages and how marketing strategies adapt to local cultural norms. Students analyze advertisements from different countries and identify how cultural values (e.g., family, success, tradition) are reflected.

Encouraging Reflection and Critical Thinking

Developing intercultural competence is not just about exposure but also about processing and questioning. Reflection activities might include:

- ✓ Intercultural journals where students record insights and questions after each lesson.
- ✓ Think-pair-share tasks prompting learners to compare the lesson's content with their own cultural experiences.

Project-Based Learning and Virtual Exchanges

Long-term projects allow deeper engagement. For instance, students could work with a partner class abroad to investigate a shared topic (e.g., climate change's impact on local agriculture) and present findings in a joint online conference. This not only builds content knowledge and language skills but also creates genuine intercultural contact.

Role-play and Simulation

Simulations put students “in someone else's shoes.” Examples include:

- ✓ Negotiating a business contract between a British and a French company, with each side following culturally realistic communication styles.

✓ Simulating an international environmental summit where each group represents a different country's interests.

Benefits of Intercultural Learning Through CLIL

Cross-cultural education within the CLIL structure offers notable academic advantages as it exposes individuals to varied viewpoints while concurrently building their language and subject matter understanding. Through examining material via an additional language, students naturally observe cultural allusions, conversational manners, and societal expectations distinct from their own. This visibility prompts learners to contemplate cultural commonalities and variances, cultivate inquisitiveness regarding other communities, and grasp how understanding is formed across societies. Consequently, CLIL cultivates **increased receptivity, understanding, and regard for diversity**—abilities that are ever more vital in worldwide settings.

A further principal benefit is that CLIL advances deeper cross-cultural capability by prioritizing genuine exchange in relevant settings. Participants utilize vocabulary not merely to drill syntax, but to **resolve challenges, cooperate, and tackle worldwide matters** from diverse standpoints. This undertaking aids pupils in developing the knack to decipher culturally embedded meanings, **modify their interaction techniques**, and function successfully with colleagues from differing upbringings—aptitudes crucial for worldwide partnership and career progression.

CLIL also **reinforces students' perception** of their personal cultural background. As they encounter fresh cultural structures via documents, visuals, analyses, or classroom debates, participants **grow more mindful of their own principles, presuppositions, and discourse patterns**. This self-knowledge is a vital element of cross-cultural capability, as it assists people in engaging thoughtfully instead of relying on clichés. Moreover, studying subject matter through a different language permits students to reach international knowledge reservoirs, expanding their intellectual scope and fostering a worldwide perspective.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, cross-cultural instruction via CLIL **promotes more comprehensive and engaged classrooms**. Tasks demanding teamwork, bargaining, and dialogue assist pupils in **valuing different operational approaches and opinions**. The inclusion of genuine resources—like global news pieces, scientific findings, or heritage case analyses—furnishes richer input and **inspires participants to investigate practical concerns**. This sharpens thoughtful analysis and helps students learn to appraise data from culturally varied origins.

Overall, cross-cultural education through CLIL **endows learners with linguistic competence, cultural perceptiveness, and global consciousness**. By merging language acquisition with content knowledge and cultural contemplation, CLIL supports the cultivation of balanced, flexible people who are ready to participate in multicultural academic and vocational settings.

Challenges and Considerations

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) poses various challenges that educators and institutions need to address to ensure successful implementation. A major issue is the heightened cognitive and linguistic demands on students, who are required to process both subject matter and a foreign language simultaneously. This dual pressure may impede understanding, especially for those students with lower language skills or limited familiarity with academic terminology. Additionally, learners may experience inconsistent progress, grasping subject content

more rapidly than the language necessary to articulate or apply it, which can result in frustration and decreased involvement.

Educators also run into considerable hurdles. CLIL demands that instructors possess robust subject matter knowledge and suitable language capability, alongside the aptitude to blend these two domains utilizing fitting instruction methods. Many teachers sense they are insufficiently prepared in language support, varied format teaching, and evaluation methods that distinguish linguistic mistakes from conceptual confusion. Partnership between subject educators and language instructors is vital but is not always achievable owing to scheduling limitations or the establishment's ethos.

Substance and aids present an added difficulty source. CLIL curricula frequently lack prepared aids that harmonize subject intensity with understandable language, meaning staff must commit substantial energy in modifying textbooks, devising glossaries, and crafting supported activities. Brought-in resources might not mirror regional cultural or syllabus requirements, rendering content less familiar or pertinent for pupils.

There are likewise learner-related factors. Certain pupils feel apprehension when studying via a non-native tongue, which could curb their readiness to converse or take part actively in classes. Varied proficiency sets increase intricacy, as pupils' language proficiencies frequently vary greatly, necessitating tailored teaching and further aid. Many pupils also require direct coaching in scholarly tactics like jotting notes, reading specialized texts, or employing visual layouts to manage CLIL's demands.

From an instructional perspective, CLIL necessitates careful structuring. Successful learning relies on unambiguous content and language aims, organized scaffolding, diverse media, and thoughtfully created assignments that foster both linguistic growth and advanced reasoning. Evaluation must be tackled intentionally to prevent faulting learners for language slips that don't impact core comprehension. Ongoing, ongoing evaluation assists instructors in modifying teaching, tracking grasp, and fostering language progress.

Lastly, infrastructure and governing constraints exert a key influence. Effective CLIL rollout necessitates extended curriculum structuring, skill-building chances, and management backing. Institutions also need to convey transparently with guardians, who might stress over diminished subject

Conclusion

CLIL offers a uniquely fertile environment for developing intercultural competence, marrying language learning with authentic, culturally rich content. By deliberately embedding cultural objectives into subject teaching, educators can equip learners not only to speak another language but to navigate the complexities of global communication with insight, respect, and adaptability. The approach demands careful planning, teacher training, and reflective practice, but the outcome—students prepared for a multicultural world—is well worth the investment.

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