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CLIL IN TEACHING ECONOMICS AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become increasingly relevant in higher education, especially in disciplines requiring global communication skills such as Economics. This study examines the effectiveness of CLIL – based instruction in an undergraduate Economics program at a European university. Using a quasi-experimental design, we compared language development, conceptual understanding, and student engagement across two intact groups: one following a CLIL approach and one taught through traditional lectures. Results indicate that CLIL significantly improved students’ disciplinary vocabulary, reading comprehension of economics texts, and engagement, without reducing conceptual mastery, implications for curriculum design and teacher training are discussed.

Keywords: CLIL, economics education, ESP, bilingual

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instruction.

Introduction

The globalization of economic activity and labour markets has increased the need for graduates, who can function professionally in English, the dominant language of international business and research. As a response, universities worldwide are introducing English-medium instruction and bilingual learning models. One approach gaining prominence is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which students simultaneously develop disciplinary competence and foreign language proficiency.

Research on CLIL in higher education suggests benefits such as enhanced vocabulary development, increased motivation, and improved access to international academic resources. However, most studies focus on fields like teacher education, STEM, or business administration. Less is known about how CLIL functions specifically in Economics, a subject requiring precise conceptual language, mathematical literacy, and engagement with authentic academic texts.

The present study aims to investigate:

1. Whether CLIL enhances students' disciplinary vocabulary in Economics;
2. Whether CLIL affects conceptual understanding of key economic content;
3. How students perceive the integration of language and content. We hypothesize that CLIL instruction will lead to improved language outcomes and equal or greater conceptual achievement compared to traditional instruction.

Method

Participants were 84 first-year Economics students enrolled at a large public university. Two intact seminar groups were used: a CLIL group (n=41) and a non – CLIL control group (n=43). All participants were B1-B2 level English users

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based on institutional placement tests.

Materials

Instructional materials included authentic economics texts (e.g., introductory microeconomics chapters, newspaper articles, and case studies), teacher – created scaffolding guides, and task worksheets aligned with CLIL methodology. Language assessment instruments included a disciplinary vocabulary test and an economics reading comprehension test.

Procedure

The CLIL group received instruction entirely in English, integrating language objectives (e.g., hedging devices, argumentation patterns, economic terminology) with content objectives (e.g., supply and demand, elasticity, market failures). The control group received the same content in L1 using traditional lectures and reading assignments.

The intervention lasted 12 weeks. Pre- and post-tests measured vocabulary and reading comprehension. Conceptual understanding was assessed using standardized course exams. A student perception survey was administered to the CLIL group.

Design

A quasi-experimental design with pre-test/post-test comparison was used. Independent variable: instructional approach (CLIL vs traditional). Dependent variables: vocabulary gain, reading comprehension, exam scores, and student attitudes.

Results

Independent-samples t-tests revealed that the CLIL group improved significantly on disciplinary vocabulary ($p < 0, 1$) and reading comprehension ($p < 0, 5$) compared with the control group. No significant difference was found in conceptual exam scores ($p > 0, 5$). Indicating that CLIL did not hinder content learning. Survey results showed high student engagement, particularly with communicative tasks and

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authentic materials.

Discussion

The findings support the use of CLIL in university-level Economics courses. CLIL appears to enhance linguistic competence without compromising academic content understanding. This aligns with prior research indicating that language-rich environments promote deeper processing of disciplinary texts.

However, successful implementation requires careful scaffolding, teacher training, and alignment between language and content objectives. The study is limited by its short duration and the use of intact groups, which may influence generalizability. Future research could include longitudinal designs and mixed-method approaches to explore long-term academic outcomes and student trajectories.

CLIL can serve as an effective strategy for preparing Economics students for global academic and professional environments. Universities should consider integrating CLIL into curriculum reforms, particularly in fields where English serves as a lingua franca for research and practice.

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