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Examining CLIL's Influence on EFL Learners' Oral Proficiency Development

Fachria Yamin Marasabessy^{1*}, Awaludin Rizal², Abdulhalim Daud², Siti Hadiani¹

^{1*} Faculty of Teaching, Training and Education, Universitas Terbuka, Ternate, Indonesia

² Faculty of Teaching, Training and Education, Universitas Khairun, Ternate, Indonesia

*Correspondence e-mail: fachria_ym@ecampus.ut.ac.id

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on the development of oral proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Addressing a notable gap in the literature regarding effective strategies for enhancing communicative competence, particularly speaking skills, this research explores how integrating subject content with English instruction impacts learners' oral abilities. Employing a qualitative methodology within a university students' CLIL program, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and student reflective journals. Findings reveal that CLIL fosters increased willingness to speak, as learners are motivated by both content engagement and the expectation to articulate their understanding in English. Students report that conceptual mastery is a prerequisite for confident and meaningful oral expression, though challenges such as limited vocabulary and the complexity of material can hinder fluency. Interactive classroom practices—including discussions, debates, group projects, and presentations—are perceived as critical to acquiring communicative competence, providing authentic contexts for language use and peer collaboration. Lecturers and students alike observe notable gains in fluency, confidence, and the use of academic vocabulary over time, though emotional barriers such as fear of mistakes and anxiety about performance persist. The study emphasizes the necessity of supportive, student-centered environments and targeted scaffolding to address both linguistic and affective challenges. By illuminating the mechanisms and outcomes of CLIL in EFL contexts, the research provides valuable insights to educators and policymakers striving to enhance oral proficiency through integrated content and language instruction.

Keywords: Examining CLIL; EFL Learners; Oral Proficiency



1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of language learning and teaching, the quest for effective methodologies that foster communicative competence has become paramount, particularly in contexts where English is acquired as a foreign language (EFL). Among the various pedagogical approaches that have emerged, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has garnered considerable attention for its dual focus on subject content and language acquisition (Taylor, 2022). CLIL is defined as an educational approach in which subjects are taught and learned in a language that is not the learner's mother tongue, with the dual aim of promoting both content mastery and language proficiency (Aladini & Jalambo, 2021). This approach stands in stark contrast to traditional language instruction, which often isolates language learning from meaningful content and real-life communicative purposes. As globalisation intensifies the demand for multilingual competence, especially English proficiency, educators and policymakers have turned to CLIL as a promising strategy to enhance students' language skills, particularly oral proficiency, which remains a significant challenge for many EFL learners (Mercedes et al., 2020).

The rationale behind integrating content and language stems from the recognition that language is best learned in context and through authentic use. Traditional EFL instruction, which tends to emphasize grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, frequently falls short in preparing learners for spontaneous and effective oral communication (Guntur et al., 2023). In many EFL settings, students may excel in written examinations yet struggle with speaking and listening tasks, indicating a gap between academic language knowledge and practical communicative ability. CLIL addresses this gap by immersing learners in subject-matter content, such as science, history, or mathematics, delivered through the medium of English. This immersive environment provides learners with abundant opportunities to use the target language for meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative problem-solving (Agustina & Malang, 2022). As a result, CLIL has been posited not only as a means to enrich content knowledge but also as a vehicle for developing oral proficiency, a critical component of communicative competence.

The theoretical foundations of CLIL draw upon several strands of language acquisition research, including sociocultural theory, communicative language teaching, and cognitive psychology (Qiao & Zhao, 2023). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction in the development of higher-order cognitive and linguistic skills. In CLIL classrooms, learners are encouraged to participate in dialogic exchanges, group discussions, and project-based activities, facilitating the co-construction of knowledge and language. This aligns with the communicative approach, which prioritises authentic communication over rote memorisation and repetitive drills (Pardede, 2020). Furthermore, cognitive theories suggest that processing content in a foreign language requires higher-order thinking skills, which, in turn, foster deeper cognitive engagement and retention of both the

language and the subject matter. Consequently, CLIL is believed to enhance not only linguistic competence but also cognitive and metacognitive skills, contributing to holistic educational outcomes (Lamb et al., 2019).

Despite the theoretical promise of CLIL, its implementation and impact on oral proficiency development have been the subject of ongoing debate and empirical investigation. Proponents argue that CLIL provides a rich context for language use, increases learners' exposure to authentic input, and motivates students by making language learning purposeful and relevant (Lap et al., 2025). Empirical studies have reported positive outcomes, such as increased speaking fluency, improved pronunciation, and greater confidence in oral communication among CLIL students compared to their peers in traditional EFL programs. However, critics caution that the dual demands of content and language may overwhelm learners, particularly those with lower language proficiency, and that insufficient teacher training or inadequate scaffolding may undermine the effectiveness of CLIL instruction. Moreover, the variability in CLIL models, ranging from partial immersion to full integration, complicates efforts to generalise findings and assess the true impact of CLIL on oral proficiency (Mahan et al., 2018).

Given these considerations, it is essential to examine the specific mechanisms by which CLIL influences the development of oral proficiency in EFL contexts. Oral proficiency, encompassing skills such as fluency, accuracy, complexity, pronunciation, and pragmatic competence, is multifaceted and influenced by a range of factors, including learner motivation, classroom interaction patterns, teacher expertise, and the nature of the content being taught (Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2022). CLIL classrooms typically promote interactive tasks such as debates, presentations, role-plays, and collaborative projects that require students to articulate ideas, defend opinions, and negotiate meaning in English (Lopriore, 2018). These activities closely mirror real-life communicative situations, providing learners with the practice and feedback necessary to refine their oral skills. Additionally, the presence of meaningful content serves as a stimulus for communication, encouraging learners to move beyond formulaic responses and engage in more substantive and spontaneous language use (Nashaat-sobhy & Llinares, 2020).

However, the extent to which CLIL enhances oral proficiency also depends on contextual variables such as the learners' age, prior exposure to the target language, the linguistic distance between learners' first language and English, and the institutional support for CLIL implementation (Andujar & Spratt, 2023). For instance, younger learners may benefit from the naturalistic exposure to English in CLIL settings, while older students may require more explicit instruction and support. Similarly, the success of CLIL may be contingent on teachers' proficiency in both the content area and the target language, as well as their ability to design tasks that integrate language and content objectives effectively. Therefore, any examination of CLIL's influence on oral proficiency must take into account the complex interplay of individual, instructional, and contextual factors (Hongsa et al., 2023).

In light of these complexities, the present study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on CLIL by systematically examining its impact on the oral proficiency development of EFL learners. Specifically, this research aims to (1) assess the changes in learners' oral proficiency as a result of CLIL instruction, (2) identify the classroom practices and interactional features that facilitate or hinder oral language development, and (3) explore learner perceptions of CLIL and its influence on their motivation and confidence in speaking English (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). By adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative measures of oral proficiency with qualitative insights from classroom observations and learner interviews, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how CLIL shapes EFL learners' oral language abilities (Syakur et al., 2020).

Ultimately, the findings of this research have important implications for language educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to enhance English language education through innovative pedagogical approaches (Andujar & Spratt, 2023). As the demand for communicative competence in English continues to rise globally, understanding the conditions under which CLIL can effectively promote oral proficiency is critical for informing best practices and shaping the future direction of EFL instruction (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022). Through a careful examination of CLIL's influence on oral proficiency development, this study aims to shed light on the potential and challenges of integrating content and language learning in diverse educational contexts, thereby contributing to the ongoing dialogue on effective language teaching and learning in the 21st century.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the influence of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on the development of oral proficiency among EFL learners. Qualitative methodology is well-suited to exploring the complex, context-dependent, and process-oriented nature of language learning within CLIL environments, as it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, interactional dynamics, and perceptions (Creswell & Inoue, 2025). Prioritising depth over breadth, the study seeks to generate rich, descriptive data that illuminate the specific ways in which CLIL shapes learners' oral language skills (Taylor, 2022).

The research was conducted in a university where students have implemented CLIL programs across various content subjects, with English as the medium of instruction. Purposive sampling was employed to select a group of 6 EFL learners and two lecturers who have participated in CLIL classes for at least one academic year. This sampling strategy ensures that participants possess sufficient experience with the CLIL approach to truly understand its impact on their oral proficiency. Additionally, two CLIL subject teachers were included in the study to capture instructional perspectives and triangulate the findings (Bui, 2024).

Data collection relied on multiple qualitative methods to ensure credibility and depth. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all student participants. These interviews explored students' perceptions of their development of oral proficiency, their experiences with classroom interaction and language use, and their attitudes towards learning through CLIL (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The open-ended format allowed participants to express their views in detail and provided flexibility to probe emerging themes.

Second, classroom observations were carried out over a six-week period in selected CLIL classes. Observations focused on oral interaction patterns, the use of English in communicative tasks, scaffolding techniques employed by lecturers, and student engagement in speaking activities. Field notes were systematically recorded to capture both verbal exchanges and non-verbal behaviors, providing a holistic view of the classroom environment (Skinnari, 2020). The combination of interviews and observations was intended to capture both subjective experiences and naturally occurring interactions, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.

To further support the analysis, student reflective journals were collected at the end of the data collection period. Learners were asked to document their experiences, challenges, and perceived progress in oral English throughout their participation in CLIL classes. These journals provided additional insight into learners' self-assessment and ongoing language development. All data were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis involved coding the data, identifying recurrent patterns, and categorising themes related to oral proficiency development within the CLIL context. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants for feedback and clarification. Triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, journals) further strengthened the credibility and reliability of the study.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning participants pseudonyms and securely storing all data (Qiao & Zhao, 2023). Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The qualitative research design adopted in this study enables a nuanced exploration of how CLIL influences EFL learners' development of oral proficiency. By drawing on multiple data sources and perspectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of the processes, challenges, and outcomes associated with CLIL implementation in EFL settings.

2. Results and Discussions

3.1 Result

3.1.1. EFL learners perceive the impact of CLIL instruction on their oral proficiency development

The integration of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has sparked growing interest among educators and researchers alike. Understanding how students perceive the impact of CLIL instruction on their oral proficiency development is essential for optimizing teaching strategies and language outcomes. Through interviews with EFL learners, valuable insights can be gained into their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits, shedding light on the effectiveness of CLIL in enhancing spoken English skills.

Interview ID 1: *"I think that with English learning using the CLIL approach, I am quicker to try speaking, because I have to read the content and convey it back. In other words, I can recount anything I have read".*

The interview with the first student highlighted a noticeable shift in their approach to speaking English as a result of participating in CLIL-based instruction. The student described how the integration of content learning with language practice made them more eager and willing to attempt speaking in English. Rather than passively absorbing material, the student felt compelled to actively engage with the content, as the CLIL method required them to read and then articulate what they had learned. This process, they explained, fostered a sense of urgency and motivation to speak, as conveying information to others became an essential part of the learning experience.

Furthermore, the student shared that this approach developed their ability to recount information more effectively. By regularly reading and restating content in their own words, they noticed a growing confidence in expressing ideas aloud. The act of summarizing and explaining what had been read not only enhanced their oral proficiency but also helped solidify their understanding of the material. As a result, the student perceived the CLIL approach as a valuable tool for improving both their speaking skills and overall comprehension, emphasizing the positive impact it had on their language development.

Interview ID 2: *"I feel faster and easier through reading or understanding a concept or material; because of that, sometimes I lack vocabulary, but I definitely have something I want to say".*

And the other students presented in Interview ID 3: *"Indeed, everyone is different, but in my opinion, if we want to speak, we must first understand what we are talking about. That means we need to grasp the material, and the CLIL approach is the right concept".*

The insights shared by the second student reveal a nuanced perspective on learning English through the CLIL approach. This learner observed that their ability to read and quickly understand concepts or material in English had improved, making the learning process feel more accessible and efficient. They attributed this improvement to the structure of CLIL instruction, which prioritizes content comprehension alongside language development. However, despite this progress, the student candidly acknowledged moments of struggle with vocabulary limitations. Even so, these vocabulary gaps did not hinder their desire to communicate; rather, the urge to express ideas remained strong, highlighting the motivational aspect of CLIL in fostering a willingness to speak, regardless of linguistic imperfections.

This narrative demonstrates how the CLIL approach can empower students by building their confidence through content mastery. For the second student, the process of understanding material facilitated a readiness to articulate thoughts, even when the precise words were elusive. The emphasis on grasping concepts first allowed them to focus more on conveying meaning and less on perfect accuracy, reducing anxiety about making mistakes. Such an environment encourages learners to participate actively, reinforcing the idea that communication is about sharing ideas, not just flawless language production.

The third student's commentary adds another dimension to the discussion, stressing the foundational role of comprehension in spoken language. They recognized that every learner has unique strengths and learning styles, but insisted that a solid understanding of the subject matter is essential before attempting to speak about it. This student regarded the CLIL approach as particularly effective because it integrates content learning with language practice, ensuring that students do not speak in a vacuum but are instead prepared to discuss topics meaningfully. By mastering the material first, learners build the confidence and clarity needed to communicate effectively, which this student saw as a key benefit of CLIL instruction.

Together, these perspectives underscore the transformative potential of CLIL in EFL settings. Both students pointed to the importance of understanding as a prerequisite for speaking, suggesting that the integration of content and language is not only practical but essential for meaningful communication. The CLIL approach, they agreed, provides a supportive framework where students are encouraged to grapple with new ideas and concepts, and then express those ideas orally. This process not only enhances language proficiency but also nurtures critical thinking and confidence, equipping learners with the skills needed to engage in authentic, purposeful conversations in English.

The following interview responses shed light on EFL learners' perceptions of the CLIL approach and its influence on oral proficiency. These students consistently emphasize the importance of conceptual understanding as a foundation for fluent and meaningful speech. While they acknowledge that vocabulary limitations and the clarity of expression can present challenges, they agree that mastering the material enables more systematic, confident, and substantive communication. Their reflections highlight how CLIL not only encourages active speaking but also ensures that spoken contributions

are grounded in knowledge and understanding.

Interview ID 4: "In my opinion, CLIL is a very effective approach because it emphasizes conceptual understanding. For me, that's how it is; I don't know about others. However, I am confident that if everyone understands the material, they will be able to speak it fluently".

And the Interview ID 5: In principle, everyone will be able to speak fluently if they understand. But if not, their speech will be unsystematic and inconsistent. Everyone must speak based on data, not just on data, and definitely not on dreams or the saying "an empty barrel makes the most noise".

For a while, Interview ID 6: "Speaking and being substantive are beneficial, but if you speak and people don't understand, that's a problem. Because CLIL is very effective in helping students be forced to speak and express their thoughts. Sometimes I want to express everything in my head, but sometimes my vocabulary is lacking".

The perspectives shared by the students in these interviews underscore the centrality of conceptual understanding in developing oral proficiency through the CLIL approach. The fourth student articulated a strong belief in the effectiveness of CLIL, attributing its success to its focus on deep comprehension. This student emphasized that for them, and potentially for others, true fluency in speaking English follows naturally when learners fully grasp the underlying material. Their confidence stemmed from the idea that comprehension is the gateway to articulate and confident speech, suggesting that CLIL's emphasis on content mastery paves the way for students to express themselves more fluently and meaningfully.

The fifth student echoed this sentiment, framing understanding as the bedrock of systematic and consistent speech. They argued that without a solid grasp of the material, spoken contributions risk becoming disorganized and lacking coherence. This student further stressed that effective communication must be rooted in factual information and substantive knowledge, rather than vague ideas or empty rhetoric. Referencing the saying "an empty barrel makes the most noise," the student highlighted the importance of meaningful, data-driven speech over superficial or unfounded remarks. This perspective reinforces the value of CLIL in fostering a disciplined and informed approach to speaking, where substance takes precedence over mere verbal output.

Meanwhile, the sixth student brought attention to the balance between being substantive and being understood. They recognized that while expressing informed ideas is beneficial, communication loses its value if the audience cannot comprehend what is being said. The student observed that CLIL is particularly effective in encouraging students to speak and articulate their thoughts, even when faced with language challenges such as limited vocabulary. This reflection points to the dual function of CLIL:

not only does it push students to engage in meaningful discourse, but it also exposes them to the practical challenges of real communication, such as ensuring clarity and accessibility for listeners. Collectively, these interviews highlight how CLIL both motivates and equips learners to pursue fluency that is grounded in understanding, substance, and communicative effectiveness.

3.1.2. Specific classroom interactions and activities within CLIL settings contribute to EFL learners' oral language improvement

Specific classroom interactions and activities in CLIL settings play a crucial role in enhancing EFL learners' oral language skills. By engaging in content-based discussions, collaborative projects, and problem-solving tasks, students are provided with authentic opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts. These interactive experiences not only encourage active participation but also support the development of confidence, fluency, and communicative competence, making CLIL a dynamic environment for oral proficiency growth.

Interview ID 1: *"In CLIL learning, discussion groups are usually formed. Because by discussing, students can participate more and speak actively".*

For a while Interview ID 2: *"For me, I prefer CLIL learning using the debate method. Because in this way, students will engage in argumentation. In addition, we can also think critically, and sometimes we can speak spontaneously".*

The first student's reflection highlights the value of discussion groups within the CLIL classroom, emphasizing how these interactions foster greater student participation and active use of English. According to this learner, being part of a group discussion creates a supportive environment in which students can share ideas, ask questions, and respond to one another in real time. This collaborative structure not only encourages students to speak more frequently but also helps reduce the anxiety often associated with speaking a foreign language. By regularly engaging in discussions, students gradually build their confidence and oral proficiency, benefiting from both peer support and varied communicative practice.

The second student offered a complementary perspective by expressing a preference for debate activities in CLIL settings. They observed that debates require students to present and defend arguments, which naturally leads to more critical thinking and dynamic language use. The need to respond spontaneously during a debate pushes learners to think quickly and use English in authentic, unscripted ways. This kind of activity not only sharpens argumentative skills but also nurtures the ability to express complex ideas clearly and persuasively. Both students' experiences underscore the importance of interactive, content-focused activities in CLIL classrooms, showing how discussion and debate can significantly enhance oral language development by providing meaningful, motivating contexts for communication.

Interview ID 3: The form of CLIL implementation in the classroom, in my opinion, is through discussions. In that way, everyone will express their views according to their knowledge and experiences. That is certainly very intriguing and makes the class lively, because all the students participate actively.

Interview ID 4: "If we discuss CLIL learning, then the best and most commonly implemented action is the assignment of group tasks. This approach encourages students to collaborate on completing the tasks, followed by a group presentation".

The third student described classroom discussions as a central element of CLIL implementation, recognizing their power to engage every learner. They observed that discussions create a space where students can share their views based on their own knowledge and experiences, making each contribution unique and relevant. This open exchange of perspectives not only enriches the learning environment but also brings energy and enthusiasm to the classroom. By encouraging active participation from all students, discussions make lessons more dynamic and foster a sense of community, which can be especially motivating for EFL learners striving to improve their spoken English.

The fourth student highlighted group tasks as another effective CLIL strategy, noting that collaborative assignments are frequently used in their classroom. According to this student, working together on group tasks helps students practice English in an authentic, goal-oriented context. The process of collaboration not only enhances communication and teamwork skills but also prepares students for the subsequent group presentations, where they must articulate their collective findings to the class. This cycle of group work and presentation ensures that language practice is integrated with meaningful content, supporting both oral proficiency and academic development. Both students' accounts emphasize that active, collaborative activities lie at the heart of successful CLIL instruction, providing EFL learners with the interactive practice necessary for real-world communication.

Interview ID 5: "As far as I know, speaking about CLIL, usually we students will enter a Q&A session with the lecturer about the material that was just discussed at that time. That way, not only can I understand the material, but I can also practice English".

Interview ID 6: "Usually, in the implementation of CLIL, activities such as drama play are often applied. By participating in drama, students can simulate and narrate events that align with the long and unique plot of the play. I prefer and am more fluent in speaking English".

The fifth student highlighted the significance of Q&A sessions with the lecturer as a common practice in CLIL classrooms. By engaging in these interactive exchanges,

students not only reinforce their understanding of the material but also gain practical opportunities to use English in a purposeful manner. The student noted that being able to ask and answer questions about newly discussed content helps bridge the gap between comprehension and active language use. Through this process, learners are encouraged to process information, formulate responses on the spot, and practice expressing their ideas clearly, all of which contribute to the development of their oral proficiency in English.

Meanwhile, the sixth student offered a different perspective, pointing to drama activities as a valuable CLIL strategy. They explained that participating in drama plays allows students to simulate real-life scenarios and narrate events that unfold within the rich, extended narrative structure of the play. This immersive experience not only makes language learning more engaging but also gives students the chance to practice English in a creative and meaningful context. The student emphasized a personal preference for drama as it provides greater fluency and comfort in speaking, suggesting that such activities help lower inhibitions and promote spontaneity in communication. Together, these accounts illustrate the diversity of CLIL activities that can support oral language growth, from structured Q&A sessions to imaginative performance-based tasks.

3.1.3. Challenges EFL learners experience in developing oral proficiency through CLIL-based instruction

EFL learners often encounter a range of challenges while developing oral proficiency through CLIL-based instruction. While the integration of content and language offers meaningful learning opportunities, students may struggle with limited vocabulary, difficulties in expressing complex ideas, or anxiety about speaking in front of peers. These obstacles can hinder active participation and fluency, highlighting the need for targeted support and adaptive teaching strategies within CLIL classrooms.

Interview ID 1: "In my opinion, the main challenge of learning through the CLIL approach is that the material can be difficult, which raises the question: how can I speak fluently when only a few people understand what is being taught?". Because I really need to understand the material well".

Interview ID 2: Regarding CLIL, I think that if applied in the classroom for English learning, sometimes on one hand I want to talk a lot, but often I also struggle because I don't understand or know what to talk about. So I think understanding is important.

The first student identified the complexity of the material as a primary challenge in CLIL-based learning. They expressed concern that when the content is difficult and not widely understood among peers, it becomes much harder to speak fluently in English. This student emphasized the importance of deep comprehension, noting that without a solid grasp of the subject matter, meaningful oral participation is nearly impossible. Their experience highlights how the dual demands of understanding both the content and the language can create significant barriers to effective communication, making it

clear that successful CLIL instruction relies on accessible, well-supported material. The second student echoed these concerns, sharing that while they often feel motivated to participate actively in English, they sometimes struggle to find things to say due to a lack of understanding. This internal conflict between the desire to speak and the uncertainty about the topic underscores the central role of comprehension in oral language development. The student's remarks reinforce the idea that, within a CLIL framework, building understanding must precede meaningful communication. Together, these perspectives reveal that challenges in grasping the material can directly impact EFL learners' confidence and ability to express themselves, underscoring the need for instructional strategies that prioritize clarity and comprehension.

Interview ID 3: Actually, I really want to speak in English, but I'm afraid of making grammatical mistakes. Secondly, the meaning and significance do not align with what is being discussed. Therefore, when talking about CLIL, both must be balanced.

Interview ID 4: In English-language learning using the CLIL approach, I sometimes feel anxious about making mistakes because my vocabulary is limited. I need to memorize more words.

The third student revealed that, despite a strong desire to speak in English, fear of making grammatical mistakes often holds them back. They also expressed concern that what they say may not accurately convey the intended meaning or fit the context of the discussion. This anxiety reflects the dual challenge within CLIL classrooms: students must balance the demands of grammatical accuracy with the need for meaningful communication. The student's experience illustrates how these pressures can inhibit participation, suggesting that for CLIL to be truly effective, learners require support that addresses both language form and content relevance.

The fourth student described feeling anxious about speaking due to limited vocabulary. The pressure to recall and use the right words in real-time conversations creates a barrier to active participation in CLIL-based lessons. This student recognized the need to expand their vocabulary as a way to overcome this challenge and communicate more confidently. Their perspective highlights a common struggle among EFL learners: the link between lexical knowledge and oral proficiency. Together, these accounts underscore the importance of supportive classroom practices—such as vocabulary-building activities and error-tolerant environments—that empower students to speak more freely and with greater confidence in CLIL settings.

Interview ID 5: Well, sir, when learning English, especially speaking, I am too slow to understand the material. Therefore, sometimes I also speak slowly. So it all depends on the topic of the material I am learning.

Interview ID 6: Yes, sir. Indeed, everyone is different. For me, when discussing CLIL, I still feel my vocabulary is insufficient. So even though I understand the material quickly, because my vocabulary is lacking, it's the same, sir.

The fifth student shared that their pace in understanding new material significantly affects their oral performance in English. They noted that when faced with challenging topics, it takes them longer to process the information, which in turn slows down their speech. This sense of delay is closely tied to the complexity of the material being discussed, suggesting that both comprehension speed and topic familiarity play crucial roles in shaping students' confidence and fluency. The student's experience highlights a key challenge in CLIL classrooms: the need to balance content difficulty with adequate support so that learners can keep up and participate actively in spoken English tasks.

The sixth student presented a different but equally important perspective, noting that while they are able to grasp the material quickly, limited vocabulary presents a persistent barrier to effective oral communication. Despite having a solid understanding of the content, this student finds it challenging to express ideas fully due to insufficient lexical resources. Their reflection underscores a common reality for many EFL learners in CLIL settings: comprehension alone does not guarantee fluency or ease in speaking. Both students' accounts point to the importance of tailored instruction that addresses diverse learner needs—whether by scaffolding content for slower processors or by systematically expanding vocabulary for those ready to express more complex ideas.

3.1.4. The Lecturers and learners describe changes in oral communication skills over time in a CLIL environment

Lecturers and learners alike observe notable changes in oral communication skills as students progress within a CLIL environment. Over time, both groups report increased confidence, improved fluency, and greater ability to express complex ideas in English. These developments are attributed to the sustained practice and authentic interactions that CLIL settings provide, allowing students to gradually overcome initial barriers and demonstrate measurable growth in their spoken language abilities.

Interview Lecturer 1: "I am more focused on observing the extent of speaking development and fluency, the use of academic vocabulary, and how much it can instill confidence in students in every communication".

Interview Lecturer 2: In every application of English language learning, especially in speaking, the most important thing is to build fluency and self-confidence; for me, that is the main point. Regarding making mistakes while speaking, for me, it's not about focusing on fluency first; it will be corrected step by step later.

The first lecturer emphasized a multi-faceted approach to monitoring student progress in oral communication within the CLIL environment. They highlighted a keen focus on observing not just the development of speaking skills and overall fluency, but

also the increased use of academic vocabulary during classroom interactions. According to this lecturer, one of the most significant indicators of student growth is the boost in confidence that emerges as learners become more adept in expressing ideas. By tracking these aspects, the lecturer aims to ensure that students are not only improving linguistically but are also gaining the self-assurance needed to participate actively and meaningfully in English communication.

The second lecturer echoed similar priorities, stressing that the most essential outcomes of English language learning—especially in speaking—are enhanced fluency and strengthened self-confidence. This lecturer viewed the journey toward effective oral communication as a gradual process, where building comfort and flow in speaking takes precedence over the immediate correction of mistakes. They believed that encouraging students to speak freely, without the fear of errors, creates an environment where learners are more willing to engage and practice. Corrections, in their perspective, should come later and be approached incrementally, allowing students to focus on communication first and refine their accuracy over time. Both lecturers' approaches reflect a commitment to fostering a supportive and growth-oriented CLIL classroom, where sustained practice leads to measurable gains in both fluency and confidence.

Interview ID 1: Well, indeed, in every classroom learning, including with the CLIL approach, I sometimes feel embarrassed and afraid of making mistakes when expressing my ideas or thoughts because I worry they won't meet expectations or that my grammar won't be correct.

Interview ID 2: Usually, because the material is difficult to understand, I sometimes don't speak fluently. Therefore, we should form discussion groups to exchange ideas so everyone can quickly grasp the material.

The first student candidly described the emotional barriers they face when participating in classroom activities, particularly within the CLIL approach. Feelings of embarrassment and fear of making mistakes often surface when they attempt to express their thoughts or ideas in English. This anxiety is rooted both in concerns about not meeting expectations and in worries about grammatical accuracy. Such apprehension can restrict their willingness to speak, highlighting a common struggle among EFL learners: the challenge of overcoming self-doubt to become more active and confident communicators. The student's experience illustrates the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment that normalizes mistakes as part of the learning process and encourages risk-taking in language use.

The second student pointed to the complexity of the material as another significant hurdle impacting their fluency in speaking. When content is difficult to understand, this student finds it much harder to communicate smoothly in English. To address this, they suggested the formation of discussion groups as a practical solution. By collaborating and

exchanging ideas with peers, students can collectively work through challenging material, accelerating comprehension and making it easier to participate in oral activities. This approach not only helps break down complex topics but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility, empowering learners to practice speaking more confidently and frequently. Together, these accounts underscore the intertwined nature of emotional and cognitive challenges in CLIL settings and the value of interactive, supportive learning strategies.

4.1. Discussions

4.1.1 EFL learners perceive the impact of CLIL instruction on their oral proficiency development

The data from Interview ID 1 reveals that the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach accelerates learners' willingness to speak English, primarily through the process of reading and then recounting content. The participant emphasizes that the act of having to read and convey information back in English builds both confidence and fluency. This process of active recall, where students are required not only to understand material but also to retell it, creates a structured environment that encourages frequent speaking practice (Nashaat-sobhy & Llinares, 2020). The interviewee's experience suggests that this approach does not just foster passive understanding but also transforms receptive skills into productive language use, making the learner more proactive in speaking English and more comfortable sharing what they have learned (Hidalgo, 2023).

In Interview ID 2, the respondent highlights the role of reading and comprehension in facilitating faster and easier language acquisition. The individual acknowledges that while vocabulary gaps remain a challenge, the desire to communicate ideas persists, driven by understanding the material. This response indicates a shift in focus from linguistic perfection to meaningful communication, where comprehension of the subject matter is prioritized over flawless vocabulary. The CLIL framework, by integrating content learning with language development, appears to motivate students to express themselves even when their vocabulary is limited (Banegas, 2020). It also suggests that students are more willing to take linguistic risks and attempt communication when they have a clear understanding of the topic, thus enhancing both confidence and communicative competence (Evnitskaya & Dalton-puffer, 2020).

Interview ID 3 underscores the importance of understanding subject matter before attempting to speak about it, stating that comprehension is a prerequisite for meaningful oral expression. The participant points out individual differences in learning preferences but asserts that grasping the material is fundamental, and the CLIL approach is well-suited for this purpose. This perception aligns with the principles of CLIL, which advocate for content knowledge as the foundation for language use (Skinnari, 2020). The response also reflects a metacognitive awareness among students, as they recognize the need to internalize content before engaging in productive skills like speaking. Collectively, these interviews demonstrate that the CLIL approach fosters a deeper and

more confident engagement with English, as students are encouraged to move from understanding to expression, and to focus on content-driven communication rather than isolated language mechanics (Agustina & Malang, 2022).

From Interview ID 4, the respondent strongly supports the effectiveness of the CLIL approach, particularly because it prioritizes conceptual understanding. The participant expresses confidence that genuine comprehension of material leads directly to fluency in speaking, suggesting a clear link between mastery of content and productive language skills. This viewpoint highlights the transformational nature of CLIL, where the focus on understanding—not mere memorization—enables students to articulate ideas more clearly and confidently. The emphasis on individual experience, as shown by the phrase “I don’t know about others,” also suggests that while personal learning styles may vary, there is a belief that deep comprehension can universally enhance spoken fluency (Mensel, 2019).

In Interview ID 5, there is a continuation of this theme, with an added focus on the structure and consistency of speech. The interviewee claims that systematic and consistent speech comes from a solid grasp of the material, warning that without understanding, students’ language output can become disorganized. The assertion that “everyone must speak based on data, not just on data, and definitely not on dreams or the saying ‘an empty barrel makes the most noise’” implies that substance and evidence are critical components of meaningful communication (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). This reflects a desire for learners to ground their speaking in fact-based understanding rather than superficial talk, reinforcing the value of the CLIL approach in driving both content mastery and effective expression (Belda-medina, 2025).

Interview ID 6 adds another layer to the analysis by addressing the challenges and limitations that can arise, even within an effective framework like CLIL. The participant acknowledges the benefits of speaking substantively but also points out a potential barrier: audience comprehension. The statement “if you speak and people don’t understand, that’s a problem” underscores that communication is only successful when the intended message is received. Additionally, the interviewee’s reflection on vocabulary limitations—wanting to express more than language resources allow—highlights the ongoing tension between content knowledge and linguistic ability (Lap et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the student credits CLIL with “forcing” students to express their thoughts, suggesting that the approach encourages risk-taking and active participation, even when vocabulary is lacking. This shows that CLIL not only promotes conceptual understanding and meaningful speaking but also supports learners in navigating the real-world challenges of language production (Hasnah, 2024).

4.1.2. Specific classroom interactions and activities within CLIL settings contribute to EFL learners’ oral language improvement

The response from Interview ID 1 highlights the central role of discussion groups within the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) framework. The participant points out that these group discussions create an environment where

students are encouraged to participate more actively and engage in spoken English. This suggests that collaborative learning settings not only support language development but also promote social interaction, peer learning, and confidence-building (Taylor, 2022). By regularly engaging in discussions, students are given repeated opportunities to articulate their thoughts, respond to others, and negotiate meaning, all of which are essential skills for language proficiency. The data implies that the interactive and communicative aspects of CLIL foster a sense of community and shared responsibility among learners, motivating them to speak up and contribute more frequently (Andujar & Spratt, 2023).

Interview ID 2 presents a complementary perspective, emphasizing a preference for the debate method within the CLIL approach. According to this participant, debates push students to engage in argumentation, think critically, and speak spontaneously. The debate format requires learners not only to understand and articulate their own viewpoints but also to respond to opposing arguments in real time. This dynamic process enhances critical thinking skills and encourages on-the-spot language production, which can lead to greater fluency and flexibility in communication. The ability to speak spontaneously in debates reflects a deeper command of the language, as students must quickly process information, organize their thoughts, and express themselves persuasively. Collectively, both interviews indicate that active, interactive methods such as group discussions and debates within the CLIL framework are highly effective for promoting active engagement, critical thinking, and the development of productive language skills (Skinnari, 2020).

Interview ID 3 emphasizes that discussions are a core component of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) implementation in the classroom. According to the participant, these discussions allow each student to express their views in line with their own knowledge and experiences, which not only enriches the learning process but also invigorates the classroom atmosphere. The participant highlights the positive impact of this approach on student engagement: when everyone is invited to participate, the classroom becomes more dynamic and lively. This suggests that CLIL, through the use of open discussions, provides a platform for students to share personal insights, fosters inclusivity, and ensures that learning is both interactive and student-centered. The data underscores how the discussion format within CLIL not only supports language practice but also nurtures a sense of belonging and active involvement among all students (Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2022).

In Interview ID 4, the participant identifies group tasks followed by presentations as the most effective and prevalent practice in CLIL classrooms. Assigning collaborative group projects compels students to work together, negotiate meaning, and pool their resources to complete tasks, which mirrors real-world communication and problem-solving (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022). The subsequent group presentations serve as an opportunity for learners to publicly articulate their findings, enhancing both their content mastery and spoken English skills. This approach encourages teamwork, accountability, and public speaking, aligning well with CLIL's dual focus on content and

language. The data here suggests that structured group activities, culminating in presentations, are invaluable in promoting both collaboration and communicative competence, further supporting the notion that CLIL thrives on active, student-driven learning experiences (Lopriore, 2018).

4.2.3. Challenges EFL learners experience in developing oral proficiency through CLIL-based instruction

Interview ID 1 highlights a significant challenge within the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach: the complexity of the material. The participant expresses concern about how the difficulty of the subject matter can hinder fluency in speaking, especially when comprehension is not widespread among students. This perspective underscores the importance of thorough understanding as a prerequisite for effective communication. The respondent's question "how can I speak fluently when only a few people understand what is being taught?" reflects an awareness that content mastery is foundational to productive language use (Feddermann, 2021). It also suggests that when material is too challenging, it can lead to hesitation, lack of confidence, and reduced classroom interaction, ultimately impeding both language development and engagement (Mensel, 2019).

Interview ID 2 echoes these concerns by emphasizing the role of understanding in successful participation. The participant describes a conflict between the desire to be verbally active and the struggle to find things to say due to limited comprehension of the content (Lamb et al., 2019). This reveals that students may be motivated to participate and speak more, but gaps in understanding often constrain their contributions. The data points to the fact that comprehension is central to meaningful communication in a CLIL classroom; when students do not fully grasp the content, it diminishes both their confidence and their willingness to speak. Together, these interviews suggest that while CLIL presents valuable opportunities for language practice, its effectiveness depends heavily on ensuring that students can understand the material, as true fluency and active participation are built upon a solid foundation of content knowledge (Nashaat-sobhy & Llinares, 2020).

Interview ID 3 reveals a strong desire to participate in English speaking activities, yet this motivation is tempered by fear of making grammatical mistakes and concerns about accurately conveying meaning. The participant highlights that effective communication in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) context requires a balance between correct language use and meaningful content. This underscores the dual challenges faced by learners: not only must they strive for grammatical accuracy, but they must also ensure their contributions are relevant to the topic at hand. The interviewee's anxiety about both form and content suggests that the pressure to succeed in both areas can inhibit participation, even among students who are eager to speak. This insight points to the need for supportive classroom environments where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process and where both linguistic and content-related efforts are encouraged and valued (Hidalgo, 2023).

Interview ID 4 adds another dimension by focusing on anxiety stemming from limited vocabulary. The respondent admits to feeling nervous about making mistakes, particularly because their word knowledge is not yet sufficient. The emphasis on the need to memorize more words suggests that vocabulary gaps can be a significant barrier to active participation and confidence in CLIL-based English learning (Nashaat-sobhy & Llinares, 2020). This sense of inadequacy can lead to increased hesitation and reduce opportunities for meaningful engagement in classroom discussions. The data indicates that while the CLIL method offers valuable opportunities for integrated content and language learning, students may still struggle with language-specific anxieties—especially regarding vocabulary and correctness. Addressing these issues through targeted vocabulary development and creating a safe space for language experimentation could help alleviate student concerns and foster greater participation.

Interview ID 5 highlights the impact of comprehension speed on speaking fluency in English learning, particularly within the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) context. The participant notes that slow understanding of the material directly leads to slower and more hesitant speech. This connection suggests that the ability to process and grasp content efficiently is crucial for confident verbal expression. Furthermore, the interviewee points out that their performance depends heavily on the topic being covered; some material may be more accessible, allowing for smoother communication, whereas more complex topics can cause both understanding and speech to lag (Aladini & Jalambo, 2021). This insight underscores the importance of carefully selecting and scaffolding CLIL content to match students' current proficiency levels, ensuring that the material supports rather than hinders the development of speaking skills (Lamb et al., 2019).

Interview ID 6 provides a contrasting yet complementary perspective by focusing on vocabulary limitations rather than comprehension speed. The respondent acknowledges that, despite being able to understand content quickly, a lack of vocabulary remains a significant barrier to effective communication. This situation leads to frustration, as understanding alone does not always translate into the ability to express thoughts clearly in English. The data from this interview reinforces the dual challenge faced by CLIL learners: both content comprehension and language resources (such as vocabulary) must develop in tandem to achieve fluent and confident speaking. Together, the responses from Interviews 5 and 6 illustrate that success in CLIL classrooms is influenced by multiple factors comprehension speed for some, vocabulary breadth for others and that addressing both dimensions is necessary to support all learners in their journey toward effective English communication (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022).

4.2.3. The Lecturers and learners describe changes in oral communication skills over time in a CLIL environment

Interview Lecturer 1 emphasizes a comprehensive approach to evaluating students' progress in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classrooms, focusing on speaking development, fluency, and the integration of academic vocabulary. The lecturer is particularly attentive to how these factors contribute to student confidence during

communication. This perspective highlights the belief that CLIL should not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also help students become comfortable and self-assured speakers in academic contexts (Lamb et al., 2019). By stressing the importance of academic vocabulary usage, the lecturer suggests that content-based language learning serves both to broaden students' lexical range and to prepare them for real-world academic or professional situations. The ultimate measure of success, in the lecturer's view, lies in how effectively students can combine fluency, relevant vocabulary, and confidence to participate actively in communicative tasks (Seraj, 2022).

Interview Lecturer 2 offers a slightly different but complementary viewpoint, prioritizing fluency and self-confidence as the foundation of effective English speaking. This lecturer asserts that helping students become fluent and confident should take precedence over the immediate correction of mistakes. The belief is that errors are a natural part of the learning process and can be addressed gradually, rather than serving as a barrier to participation (Aladini & Jalambo, 2021). This approach encourages a supportive learning environment where students are motivated to speak without excessive fear of making mistakes, thus fostering greater oral participation and risk-taking. Together, both lecturers' insights underscore the importance of fluency, confidence, and vocabulary development in CLIL classrooms, while also advocating for patience and a growth-oriented mindset in addressing language errors over time (Abdedulkarim & Ahmed, 2024).

Interview ID 1 highlights the psychological barriers many students face in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) environments, particularly feelings of embarrassment and fear of making mistakes when speaking. The participant expresses concern that their ideas may not meet expectations and that their grammar might be incorrect, leading to hesitation in expressing thoughts (Banegas, 2020). This self-consciousness can significantly hinder participation and reduce opportunities for oral practice, which are essential for language development. The data suggests that for some students, the pressure to perform accurately in both content and language can create anxiety, emphasizing the need for a supportive classroom climate. Such an environment would encourage students to share their ideas freely, view mistakes as learning opportunities, and gradually build confidence through positive reinforcement and constructive feedback (Piacentini, 2021).

Interview ID 2 shifts focus to the challenge of understanding complex material and its effect on speaking fluency. The participant notes that when the content is difficult, it hampers their ability to communicate smoothly. To address this, they advocate for the formation of discussion groups, which facilitate the exchange of ideas and help all students grasp the material more quickly. This approach leverages peer support, allowing students to collaboratively clarify concepts and reinforce each other's understanding (Guntur et al., 2023). The data underscores the value of collaborative learning in CLIL settings, as discussion groups not only enhance comprehension but also provide a safe space for students to practice speaking, make mistakes, and learn from one another.

Together, these interviews reveal that both emotional support and collaborative strategies are crucial for overcoming barriers to active participation and for fostering successful language and content learning in CLIL classrooms (Mahan et al., 2018).

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach positively influences the oral proficiency development of EFL learners. By integrating subject content with English instruction, CLIL provides authentic contexts for communication, such as discussions, debates, group projects, and presentations, which foster active participation and build learner confidence. The findings highlight that deep conceptual understanding is essential for meaningful and fluent oral expression, but challenges like limited vocabulary, anxiety about mistakes, and the complexity of content can impede progress. Supportive classroom environments, peer collaboration, and regular communicative practice are critical to overcoming these barriers and encouraging students to take linguistic risks. Both students and lecturers observed improvements in fluency, self-confidence, and the use of academic vocabulary over time, confirming the value of sustained and interactive CLIL experiences. However, the study underscores the need for tailored scaffolding and vocabulary development to address diverse learner needs effectively. Ultimately, CLIL offers a promising framework for bridging the gap between content knowledge and communicative competence, equipping EFL learners with skills necessary for real-world English communication. Ongoing research and adaptive teaching strategies remain essential to maximize the benefits of CLIL and ensure all learners can achieve their full oral proficiency potential.

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