

## **CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF ICLHE, EMI AND CLIL**

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**Introduction.** In the early 21st century, the increasing importance of foreign language competence for international communication and academic success has led to the widespread adoption of multilingual education programs across Europe. Approaches such as CLIL in primary and secondary education, EMI in higher education have emerged to integrate language learning with content instruction. However, despite these initiatives, challenges remain in effectively combining subject knowledge with language learning. In particular, these programs in higher education face difficulties in ensuring that students not only understand complex academic content but also develop sufficient proficiency in the target language to engage with the material meaningfully. This creates a gap in students' ability to achieve both content mastery and language competence simultaneously, highlighting the need for effective strategies and teaching approaches that facilitate integrated content and language learning in higher education settings.

**Research questions.** How do ICLHE teaching strategies influence students' comprehension of both content and language? What role do authentic texts and content-based tasks play in enhancing students' lexical competence in higher education?

**Theoretical framework.** The term ICLHE was first introduced at the 2003 Maastricht conference as an approach specifically designed for integrating language and content in higher education [4, 372 p]. The aim of developing this approach was to adapt CLIL for university-level education and to highlight that it represents a European model distinct from primary and secondary education, covering content specific to higher education. Therefore, we can conclude that the university-adapted form of the CLIL approach is called ICLHE. In higher education, integrating content and language involves teaching academic subjects in a second language. This approach allows students to gain knowledge in their chosen field while simultaneously improving their language skills. The term ICLHE is often understood as part of the acronym "ICL." The ICL acronym consists of three elements: "Integration" (integration), "Content" (content), and "Language" (language). "Integration" refers to structuring and sequencing subjects and curricula, joint classes, team teaching, shared learning materials, combined assessment tasks, collaboration between language and subject teachers, and cooperation between academic contexts and professional practice. "Language" generally refers to a foreign language, predominantly English, and "Content" refers to university subjects and modules, educational disciplines, curriculum content or practical exercises, as well as forms and structures of knowledge. ICL is viewed as a teaching approach in higher education, sharing common principles with ICLHE [1, 647-662 p]. According to sources from the ICLHE association, the term can be pronounced in various ways. Some pronounce the acronym letter by letter as "I [ai], C [si], L [el], H [ertʃ], E [i]," while others pronounce it in shortened forms such as /aɪkle/, /ɪkɫhi:/, or /aɪkli:/. Some researchers also suggest that ICLHE derives from English language teaching methodology and CLIL approaches. In most literature, ICLHE, like CLIL, is recognized as an approach based on the integration of content and language.

According to the definition provided by the "Language Education Quality Assurance Network" (LANQUA) project, CLIL was originally conceptualized as a dual-focused approach that

integrates a second or foreign language with subject-specific knowledge taught in that language. However, CLIL is also understood as an umbrella term encompassing several related definitions and concepts. Since CLIL was initially proposed for primary and secondary education in Europe, the term “HE” (Higher Education) was added for its application in university contexts, resulting in “ICLHE,” which stands for Integration of Content and Language in Higher Education. This term is designed to serve specialized and academic educational approaches in higher education.

Some researchers (Dafouz, Lasagabaster, Sierra; Fortanet-Gómez; Macaro; Sánchez-Pérez; Dafouz & Smit) also interpret ICLHE as similar to EMI (English as a Means of Instruction). They note that the main difference between the two models may be largely terminological. Many language teachers argue that in ICLHE, equal emphasis is placed on both language and content when subject matter is taught in an additional foreign language. In contrast, teachers working under EMI interpret this model as prioritizing content, with English serving only as a medium of instruction; language skills development is not emphasized, and no dedicated language lessons are conducted. Both EMI and ICLHE involve instruction in English, but EMI does not focus on developing students’ linguistic competencies.

### Conceptual Differences between CLIL, EMI, and ICLHE Approaches

Aspects	CLIL	ICLHE	EMI
Main goal	Integration of content and language	Integration of content and language in higher education	Teaching content in English
Traditional context	Primary and general secondary education	Higher education	Higher education
Language scope	High level and broad	High level, subject-specific, academic literacy	Limited, implicit
Theoretical basis	4Cs, sociocultural theory	Adapted 4Cs, academic literacy, CALP theory	Pragmatic theory
Target competence	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), academic discourse	Mastery of academic content

**Methodology.** This study is conducted using a qualitative research design based on document analysis, thematic data analysis, and a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. The methodology focuses on examining existing theoretical models, empirical studies, and educational frameworks related to CLIL, EMI, and ICLHE in order to identify current trends, challenges, and pedagogical implications for integrating content and language in higher education.

**Results and Discussion.** Unlike EMI, which focuses primarily on content delivery and does not include explicit language-learning goals, ICLHE treats language development as an essential

part of the curriculum. In ICLHE, courses are designed to achieve two parallel aims: students' mastery of disciplinary content and the development of their academic language skills. As Gustafsson and Jacobs note, EMI uses English mainly as a medium of instruction, while ICLHE gives equal importance to both content learning and language growth [2, 9-12 p].

**Conclusion.** In summary, ICLHE is grounded in complementary theories from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Science, which together explain how students simultaneously develop subject knowledge and academic language competence. Coyle's 4Cs framework— Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—provides the core pedagogical foundation for integrating disciplinary learning with language development in higher education. Within this approach, communication becomes the driving force through which cognitive, cultural, and content-related aims are achieved. As a result, ICLHE enables students not only to acquire academic and professional language skills but also to engage in higher-order thinking processes such as analysis and synthesis, thereby enhancing both their linguistic and disciplinary proficiency.

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