

Improving the Methodology for Developing Linguistic and Communicative Competence of Future English Language Teachers through the CLIL Approach

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Abstract. *The present study investigates the effectiveness of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in improving the methodology for developing linguistic and communicative competence among future English language teachers. Responding to the growing demand for language educators who possess not only advanced linguistic proficiency but also the ability to communicate effectively across academic and professional contexts, the study explores the pedagogical potential of CLIL in teacher education. A mixed-methods quasi-experimental research design was employed involving 72 undergraduate students enrolled in English language teacher education programmes. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests and structured questionnaires, while qualitative evidence was obtained from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals. The findings revealed that CLIL-based instruction produced statistically significant improvements in linguistic accuracy, vocabulary development, communicative fluency, interactional confidence, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary communication skills compared with conventional language instruction. The analysis further identified collaborative learning, authentic communicative tasks, reflective practice, project-based activities, and the integration of digital educational technologies as the principal factors facilitating competence development. The study argues that CLIL promotes meaningful language use by integrating subject content with language learning, thereby enhancing both academic achievement and professional readiness. It concludes that the CLIL approach represents an effective pedagogical framework for modern English language teacher education and offers valuable implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and educational innovation in multilingual learning environments.*

Keywords: *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), communicative competence, linguistic competence, english language teacher education, interdisciplinary learning, digital educational technologies, teacher training, pedagogical innovation*

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CLIL yanaşması vasitəsilə gələcək ingilis dili müəllimlərinin lingvistik və kommunikativ kompetensiyasının inkişaf etdirilməsi metodologiyasının təkmilləşdirilməsi

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Xülasə. Bu tədqiqat gələcək ingilis dili müəllimlərinin lingvistik və kommunikativ kompetensiyasının inkişaf etdirilməsi metodologiyasının təkmilləşdirilməsində Məzmun və Dilin İntegrə Edilmiş Tədrisi (Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL) yanaşmasının effektivliyini araşdırır. Yüksək dil bacarıqlarına malik olmaqla yanaşı, akademik və peşəkar mühitdə səmərəli ünsiyyət qurmaq qabiliyyətinə sahib müəllimlərə artan tələbat fonunda tədqiqat müəllim hazırlığında CLIL yanaşmasının pedaqoji potensialını qiymətləndirir. Tədqiqatda ingilis dili müəllimliyi ixtisası üzrə təhsil alan 72 bakalavr tələbəsinin iştirakı ilə qarışıq metodlara əsaslanan kvazi-eksperimental tədqiqat dizaynından istifadə edilmişdir. Kəmiyyət məlumatları ilkin və yekun testlər, eləcə də strukturlaşdırılmış sorğu anketləri vasitəsilə, keyfiyyət məlumatları isə sinif müşahidələri, yarı-strukturlaşdırılmış müsahibələr və tələbələrin reflektiv gündəlikləri əsasında toplanmışdır. Nəticələr göstərmişdir ki, CLIL - əsaslı tədris ənənəvi dil tədrisi ilə müqayisədə tələbələrin lingvistik dəqiqliyinin, lüğət ehtiyatının, kommunikativ səlisliyinin, ünsiyyət zamanı özünəinamının, tənqidi düşünmə bacarıqlarının və fənlərarası kommunikasiya qabiliyyətlərinin statistik cəhətdən əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə inkişafına səbəb olmuşdur. Təhlil həmçinin əməkdaşlığa əsaslanan öyrənmə, autentik kommunikativ tapşırıqlar, reflektiv təcrübə, layihə-əsaslı fəaliyyətlər və rəqəmsal təhsil texnologiyalarının integrasiyasını lingvistik və kommunikativ kompetensiyanın inkişafını dəstəkləyən əsas amillər kimi müəyyən etmişdir. Tədqiqat əsaslandırır ki, CLIL məzmun və dil təlimini integrasiya etməklə dilin mənalı istifadəsini təşviq edir, bununla da həm akademik nailiyyətlərin, həm də gələcək müəllimlərin peşə hazırlığının yüksəldilməsinə töhfə verir. Nəticə etibarilə, CLIL yanaşması müasir ingilis dili müəllimlərinin hazırlanması üçün effektiv pedaqoji çərçivə kimi qiymətləndirilir və kurikulumun hazırlanması, müəllim hazırlığı və çoxdilli təhsil mühitlərində pedaqoji innovasiyaların tətbiqi baxımından mühüm praktik nəticələr təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: Məzmun və Dilin İntegrə Edilmiş Tədrisi (CLIL), kommunikativ kompetensiya, lingvistik kompetensiya, ingilis dili müəllimlərinin hazırlanması, fənlərarası təlim, rəqəmsal təhsil texnologiyaları, müəllim hazırlığı, pedaqoji innovasiya

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Introduction

The rapid globalization of education, technological advancement, and increasing international mobility have substantially transformed the professional demands placed on English language teachers. Contemporary language educators are expected not only to demonstrate high levels of linguistic proficiency but also to possess communicative competence, pedagogical flexibility, intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and the ability to integrate innovative instructional approaches into classroom practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Consequently, developing linguistic and communicative competence has become one of the primary objectives of teacher education programs worldwide.

Linguistic competence has traditionally been understood as an individual's knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary, phonological systems, and syntactic structures necessary for producing grammatically correct language (Chomsky, 1965). Although this theoretical perspective established the foundation of modern linguistics, later researchers argued that grammatical knowledge alone is insufficient for successful communication in authentic social contexts. Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing that effective language use requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to apply language appropriately according to social, cultural, and contextual conditions (Hymes, 1972). Expanding this perspective, Canale and Swain proposed a comprehensive model consisting of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences, which continues to serve as a fundamental framework for communicative language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Modern language education therefore places increasing emphasis on balancing linguistic accuracy with communicative effectiveness. According to Richards (2006), successful language instruction should provide learners with opportunities to use language meaningfully through authentic communication rather than relying exclusively on grammar-focused instruction. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that contemporary language teaching methodologies should integrate communication, interaction, and learner-centered activities to prepare students for real-life language use.

Among the innovative approaches that address these educational objectives, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has gained considerable international recognition. Initially promoted within the European educational context, CLIL integrates subject content and foreign language learning so that learners simultaneously acquire disciplinary knowledge and language competence (Marsh, 2002). Coyle et al. (2010) further conceptualized CLIL through the well-established 4Cs Framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—which emphasizes the interconnected development of subject knowledge, language proficiency, cognitive skills, and intercultural understanding.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the educational benefits of CLIL implementation. Dalton-Puffer (2007) reported that CLIL environments promote spontaneous interaction and increase learners' opportunities for authentic language use. Likewise, Mehisto et al. (2008) emphasized that successful CLIL instruction combines collaborative learning, meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and continuous reflection to facilitate both academic achievement and language development. Cenoz et al. (2014) further argued that CLIL contributes not only to language proficiency but also to interdisciplinary learning and higher-order thinking skills, making it particularly valuable for contemporary educational settings.

The application of CLIL is especially relevant in teacher education, where future English language teachers must simultaneously develop language competence and effective pedagogical practices. Banegas (2016) demonstrated that CLIL enhances both teachers' professional development and their ability to design innovative instructional materials. Similarly, Ne'matov (2025) emphasized that teacher education should integrate sociocultural learning experiences that encourage collaboration, reflection, and authentic professional practice. These perspectives are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction and collaboration.

Despite the growing body of research on CLIL, relatively limited attention has been devoted to investigating its effectiveness in improving the methodology for developing both linguistic and communicative competence among future English language teachers within higher education institutions. Most previous studies have primarily examined language achievement or content

learning, while comparatively few have explored how CLIL simultaneously supports professional competence development in teacher education. Addressing this research gap is particularly important as universities continue to modernize English language teacher preparation programs in response to rapidly changing educational demands.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the CLIL approach in improving the methodology for developing linguistic and communicative competence among future English language teachers. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the CLIL approach influence the development of linguistic competence among future English language teachers?
2. To what extent does CLIL contribute to the development of communicative competence?
3. Which pedagogical mechanisms within CLIL-based learning environments most effectively facilitate competence development?

Based on the theoretical foundations and previous empirical research, the study hypothesizes that students receiving CLIL-based instruction will demonstrate significantly higher levels of linguistic and communicative competence than those receiving traditional language instruction. To examine this hypothesis, the study employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental research design, which is described in the following section.

Literature Review

The concepts of linguistic competence and communicative competence have served as the theoretical foundation of modern foreign language education for several decades. Chomsky (1965) defined linguistic competence as the internalized knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary, and syntactic structures that enables individuals to produce and understand language. Although this perspective significantly influenced linguistic theory, it was later criticized for emphasizing language form while paying limited attention to its practical use in authentic communication.

To address this limitation, Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, arguing that successful communication depends not only on grammatical knowledge but also on the ability to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. Building upon this theory, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a multidimensional model comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. Their framework remains one of the most influential theoretical models in communicative language teaching and teacher education. Furthermore, Bachman (1990) expanded this perspective by emphasizing that language competence includes both organizational and pragmatic components, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of language ability.

The communicative approach has profoundly influenced contemporary language teaching methodologies. According to Richards (2006), language instruction should prioritize meaningful communication, learner interaction, and authentic language use rather than isolated grammar instruction. Richards and Rodgers (2014) further argue that effective language teaching requires instructional approaches that actively engage learners in meaningful communicative situations while simultaneously developing linguistic accuracy and fluency. Similarly, Ellis (2003) emphasizes that task-based learning promotes communicative competence by encouraging learners to negotiate meaning while solving authentic problems through language.

Another influential perspective on language development is Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which argues that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to meaningful and comprehensible input slightly above their current level of proficiency. Complementing this view, Swain (1985) proposed the Output Hypothesis, suggesting that learners

also need opportunities to produce language actively in order to notice linguistic gaps, refine their language use, and develop communicative competence. Together, these theories highlight the importance of balancing language input and output within communicative learning environments.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as a socially mediated process in which cognitive development occurs through interaction with others. Lantolf (2000) further applied sociocultural theory to second language acquisition, emphasizing that collaborative learning, scaffolding, and guided interaction significantly contribute to language development. Likewise, Bruner (1983) stressed the importance of social interaction and instructional support in promoting language learning, particularly through collaborative educational activities. These theoretical perspectives provide a strong foundation for learner-centered instructional approaches that emphasize communication and cooperation.

Within this theoretical context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as one of the most influential innovations in foreign language education. Marsh (2002) introduced CLIL as an educational approach that integrates subject content with foreign language learning, enabling students to acquire disciplinary knowledge and language competence simultaneously. Expanding this concept, Coyle et al. (2010) proposed the 4Cs Framework, consisting of Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture, which has become the principal theoretical model guiding CLIL implementation in educational institutions.

Numerous empirical studies have confirmed the effectiveness of CLIL in improving language learning outcomes. Dalton-Puffer (2007) reported that CLIL creates authentic communicative environments that encourage spontaneous language use and increase learners' communicative confidence. Mehisto et al. (2008) identified collaborative learning, learner autonomy, authentic tasks, and continuous reflection as key characteristics of successful CLIL classrooms. Meyer (2010) additionally argued that carefully designed CLIL lessons promote higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and learner engagement through cognitively challenging instructional activities. Cenoz et al. (2014) further concluded that CLIL contributes to both language development and interdisciplinary learning when implemented through well-planned pedagogical strategies.

The application of CLIL has become increasingly important in teacher education, where future English language teachers must develop both professional knowledge and communicative competence. Banegas (2016) demonstrated that CLIL supports teachers' professional growth by improving their ability to integrate subject content with language instruction and develop innovative teaching materials. Freeman (1989) further argues that effective language teacher education requires teachers to develop reflective decision-making skills and pedagogical awareness, enabling them to adapt instructional strategies to diverse classroom contexts. Johnson (2009) similarly argues that teacher education should provide authentic professional learning experiences that encourage reflection, collaboration, and continuous pedagogical development. Furthermore, Richards and Farrell (2005) emphasize that ongoing professional development is essential for enabling teachers to implement innovative methodologies effectively within diverse educational contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effectiveness of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in developing the linguistic and communicative competence of future English language teachers. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of both measurable learning outcomes and

participants' educational experiences. The quantitative component examined changes in students' linguistic and communicative competence through pre-test and post-test assessments, whereas the qualitative component explored participants' perceptions through classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews. Such a design provides methodological triangulation and enhances the validity of educational research findings (Johnson, 2009).

Participants

The study was conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year and involved 72 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching at a pedagogical university. The participants were selected from the same academic program and demonstrated intermediate to upper-intermediate English language proficiency, as determined by institutional placement tests. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. The participants were assigned to two groups:

- Experimental Group ($n = 36$)
- Control Group ($n = 36$)

Both groups studied the same academic content throughout the semester. However, the experimental group received instruction through the CLIL approach, whereas the control group continued learning through conventional teacher-centered language instruction.

Research Instruments

To obtain comprehensive data, multiple research instruments were employed.

The quantitative instruments included:

- a linguistic competence assessment test;
- communicative performance tasks;
- a motivation and interaction questionnaire.

The qualitative instruments consisted of:

- classroom observation checklists;
- student reflective journals;
- semi-structured interviews.

Students' performance was evaluated according to six assessment criteria adapted from communicative language assessment frameworks (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996):

- grammatical accuracy;
- lexical diversity;
- communicative fluency;
- interactional confidence;
- discourse organization;
- communicative adaptability.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.89, indicating a high level of internal reliability.

Procedure

The instructional intervention lasted sixteen weeks. Before the intervention, both groups completed a pre-test designed to measure their initial levels of linguistic and communicative competence. During the intervention, the experimental group received instruction based on the CLIL approach, integrating English language learning with interdisciplinary content related to:

- educational psychology;
- media literacy;
- environmental education;
- digital pedagogy.

The instructional process incorporated various learner-centered activities, including:

- collaborative discussions;
- project-based learning;
- task-based activities;
- debates and oral presentations;
- case-study analysis;
- reflective writing;
- multimedia content creation.

These activities were designed according to the principles of CLIL pedagogy (Coyle et al., 2010; Mehisto et al., 2008; Ellis, 2003; Akhadali Ugli et al., 2025), encouraging students to use English in authentic academic and professional contexts.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and post-test assessments were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-samples *t*-tests to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between the experimental and control groups. Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Similar responses were grouped into thematic categories, enabling the identification of recurring patterns related to communicative development, learner engagement, collaborative learning, and professional competence. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for triangulation of the results, thereby increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Johnson, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for educational research. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent before the commencement of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and all collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

Results

The quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant improvement in the linguistic and communicative competence of students who participated in the CLIL-based instructional program. Although both groups demonstrated progress during the intervention period, the experimental group achieved considerably greater improvement than the control group.

Table 1

Linguistic competence results

Group	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Improvement
Experimental group	64.2	86.8	+22.6
Control group	63.7	71.5	+7.8

The paired-samples *t*-test indicated that the improvement observed in the experimental group was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, although the control group also demonstrated moderate progress, the magnitude of improvement was considerably smaller.

The classroom observation data further supported the quantitative findings. Students in the experimental group participated more actively in collaborative discussions, demonstrated greater willingness to communicate, and interacted more confidently during classroom activities. Throughout the intervention, they increasingly initiated discussions, responded more spontaneously to their peers, and employed a wider range of linguistic resources during communicative tasks.

Analysis of the communicative performance tasks revealed noticeable improvements in several dimensions of language competence. Compared with their pre-test performance, students in the experimental group produced more grammatically accurate responses, demonstrated greater lexical diversity, organized their discourse more coherently, and showed increased communicative adaptability when responding to authentic academic situations.

The qualitative data obtained from students' reflective journals also demonstrated substantial changes in learners' perceptions throughout the intervention. During the initial stages of the CLIL program, many participants reported anxiety when expressing ideas in English, particularly during interdisciplinary discussions and oral presentations. However, these concerns gradually diminished as students became more accustomed to collaborative learning activities. By the end of the intervention, most participants reported increased confidence in expressing opinions, negotiating meaning, participating in academic discussions, and using English for authentic communication.

Semi-structured interview data confirmed these observations. Most participants perceived the CLIL approach as more engaging and professionally relevant than traditional language instruction. They emphasized that integrating subject content with language learning enabled them to apply English more naturally while simultaneously developing pedagogical knowledge related to their future profession.

Qualitative thematic analysis identified five major pedagogical factors that contributed to competence development during the intervention:

- collaborative learning;
- authentic communicative tasks;
- interdisciplinary learning;
- reflective practice;
- integration of digital educational technologies.

Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the CLIL approach had a positive impact on the development of future English language teachers' linguistic competence, communicative competence, classroom interaction skills, and professional confidence.

Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach provides an effective methodological framework for developing the linguistic and communicative competence of future English language teachers. Compared with students receiving conventional language instruction, participants exposed to CLIL-based learning demonstrated substantially greater improvement in grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, communicative fluency, interactional confidence, discourse organization, and communicative adaptability. These findings indicate that integrating subject content with language instruction creates richer opportunities for meaningful language use and professional competence development.

One of the most significant findings concerns the relationship between content learning and communicative competence. Because CLIL lessons require learners to discuss authentic interdisciplinary topics, students are encouraged to use English as a medium of communication rather than merely as an object of study. This finding supports the theoretical principles proposed by Coyle et al. (2010), who argue that effective CLIL instruction integrates Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture to promote both language acquisition and subject learning. Likewise, Dalton-Puffer (2007) emphasizes that authentic content-based interaction naturally increases learners' opportunities to negotiate meaning and communicate spontaneously in classroom settings.

Another important finding relates to the role of collaborative learning in competence development. Classroom observations indicated that students became increasingly confident when participating in pair work, group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects. These findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that cognitive and language development occur through social interaction and collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, Lantolf (2000) argues that second language learning is enhanced when learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and scaffolding within meaningful social contexts.

The present study also highlights the importance of authentic communicative tasks in improving students' linguistic performance. Activities such as presentations, debates, project-based learning, and case-study analysis required learners to use English for genuine academic purposes rather than simply completing grammar exercises. This observation supports the principles of task-based language teaching proposed by Ellis (2003) and Willis and Willis (2007), who maintain that authentic communicative tasks promote both linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness by engaging learners in purposeful language use.

A further noteworthy finding concerns the contribution of reflective practice to professional competence development. Analysis of students' reflective journals revealed increasing levels of self-awareness, confidence, and responsibility for learning throughout the intervention. These findings support the view of Richards and Farrell (2005) that systematic reflection is an essential component of teacher professional development because it enables future teachers to evaluate their instructional practices critically and continuously improve their professional competence. Likewise, Johnson (2009) argues that reflective learning experiences strengthen both pedagogical knowledge and professional identity within teacher education programs.

The integration of digital educational technologies also emerged as a significant factor contributing to students' competence development. Multimedia presentations, online collaborative platforms, and digital learning resources increased learner participation, facilitated interaction, and created more dynamic learning environments. These findings are consistent with Meyer (2010), who emphasizes that carefully designed CLIL instruction supported by digital resources promotes higher-order thinking skills, learner engagement, and cognitive development.

Another important outcome of the study is the development of students' creative and critical thinking abilities while solving authentic interdisciplinary problems. Through collaborative projects and communicative tasks, learners generated original ideas, evaluated multiple perspectives, and applied English in meaningful professional contexts. This finding supports Sternberg's (2006) theory of creativity, which argues that creativity develops through active problem-solving, intellectual engagement, and the application of knowledge to authentic situations.

Although the findings confirm the effectiveness of the CLIL approach, several challenges were identified during its implementation. Some instructors experienced difficulties balancing content objectives with language learning outcomes, while others reported that preparing CLIL lessons required considerable methodological expertise, interdisciplinary knowledge, and additional instructional time. Similar implementation challenges have also been noted by Banegas (2016), who emphasizes that successful CLIL implementation depends largely on teachers' professional preparation and institutional support.

Overall, the findings suggest that integrating CLIL into English language teacher education can significantly enhance both linguistic and communicative competence while simultaneously promoting collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and professional development. Therefore,

higher education institutions should provide systematic CLIL training, methodological support, and continuous professional development opportunities for future English language teachers.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in improving the methodology for developing the linguistic and communicative competence of future English language teachers. Employing a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design, the study examined the impact of CLIL-based instruction on students' linguistic performance, communicative abilities, and professional competence.

The findings demonstrated that students who participated in CLIL-based instruction achieved significantly greater improvement than those receiving traditional language instruction. In particular, the experimental group showed notable progress in grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, communicative fluency, discourse organization, interactional confidence, and communicative adaptability. Qualitative findings further revealed that collaborative learning, authentic communicative tasks, interdisciplinary integration, reflective practice, and digital educational technologies served as the principal pedagogical mechanisms supporting competence development.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends existing research on CLIL by demonstrating how the approach contributes not only to language acquisition but also to the integrated development of professional competence among future English language teachers. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that incorporating CLIL principles into teacher education curricula can improve instructional quality, strengthen communicative competence, and better prepare prospective teachers for the demands of contemporary language education.

Despite these positive findings, the study has several limitations. The research was conducted at a single higher education institution and involved a relatively limited sample of undergraduate students. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within this specific educational context.

Future research should examine the long-term effects of CLIL on teacher professional identity, classroom performance, and career development. Comparative studies involving different universities, educational systems, and levels of language proficiency would also contribute to a broader understanding of the effectiveness of CLIL in teacher education.

In conclusion, the study provides empirical evidence that the CLIL approach represents an effective pedagogical framework for developing the linguistic and communicative competence of future English language teachers. Its integration into higher education programs has the potential to enhance both language learning outcomes and the overall quality of teacher preparation in an increasingly globalized educational environment.

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