

# Content and Language Integrated Learning: English Language Teachers' Perspectives

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## Abstract

*This study aims to explore secondary school English teachers' perceptions of CLIL. Narrative inquiry research design was used to collect data through in-depth interviews. Four teachers having a minimum of two years of teaching experience were selected purposively from four community schools located in Rupandehi, Nepal. Findings of this study reveal teachers' positive perceptions of CLIL. Since CLIL integrates language and content learning, engaging teachers in an interactive and effective educational setting, it offers students opportunities to use language in meaningful contexts. The study promotes and increases student participation and their confidence in language learning. However, teachers lacked hands-on exposure to efficiently applying this approach in their real classrooms. The teachers face challenges due to inadequate teacher training, lack of resources and students' poor English proficiency in implementing CLIL in ELT. The study can contribute to promote CLIL with teachers' awareness and professional development.*

**Keywords:** *collaborative learning, communicative language teaching, content and language integrated learning, critical thinking*

## Introduction

Content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) is an advanced and effective pedagogical approach that integrates language learning with subject-specific instruction to enhance students' academic achievement. It boosts content information and language proficiency of students. CLIL transforms and promotes multilingualism in various educational contexts (Dzulkurnain et al., 2024). Language teachers need to be skilful in both the language and the teaching content. Since it adopts linguistic skill, critical thinking skills, and intercultural capability, it engages learners in meaningful learning. In CLIL classrooms, pupils practice English to study content different to the language itself (Eslami & Geng, 2021). In this respect, Linares (2017) pointed out that successful CLIL application depends on teachers' and students' empathetic of academic subjects and their

ability to use language for learning, assessing information, and involving in classroom interaction using both first and second language enhancement (Montaner-Villalba, 2018). Creating an atmosphere where pupils enthusiastically take part in their learning process, participate in meaningful activities, and take accountability for their learning. Thus, CLIL builds self-assured learners, improves cognitive and communication skills, promotes intercultural understanding and community values, increases sensitivity to vocabulary and ideas in both languages, expands vocabulary in the target language, and develops proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. CLIL integrates language learning with academic content, allowing learners to acquire language naturally through meaningful use, rather than in isolation, thereby enhancing both linguistic and subject-specific skills (Cenoz, 2015). However, there is little research on teachers' perceptions of CLIL in Nepalese context.

## Literature Review

The literature on content and language-integrated learning underscores on integration of content and language in national and international academic context.

### Integration of Content and Language in CLIL

Content and language integrated learning exposes to numerous language contents that integrate content and language teaching. CLIL is basically grounded in the integration of content and language instruction, which establishes its core pedagogical principle (Linares & Morton, 2017; Nikula et al., 2016, Skinnari & Bovellan, 2016 Lo, 2019). In CLIL classrooms, teachers often focus more on the subject content and pay less attention to direct language teaching. Furthermore, a limited understanding among educators regarding the interrelationship between content and language can hamper the real application of CLIL's fundamental objectives (Lazarević, 2019). If teachers do not fully understand how content and language are connected, it can make it difficult to apply CLIL effectively. Villabona and Cenoz (2022) identify five key dimensions of CLIL: the integration of language and content to promote simultaneous learning, the use of authentic language through engagement with real-world texts and communication, an emphasis on communication and interaction to facilitate active participation, the promotion of cognitive engagement and critical thinking to enhance higher-order reasoning skills, cultivation of cultural and intercultural awareness to foster an appreciation of diverse perspectives and global cultures.

Active language use within the content context is the soul of CLIL however, it may lack explicit language teaching, largely due to the separation of roles between content and language teachers. This divide results in inconsistent approaches to language integration. Scholars advocate for a balanced approach that incorporates both proactive and reactive language strategies within subject teaching (Lo, 2019). However, teachers often prioritize subject matter over language instruction, hindering effective integration. Successful implementation of CLIL requires a balance between language structures and content delivery, highlighting the need to teach both elements equally rather than focusing solely on content (Barr et al., 2019; Lin, 2016). To use CLIL successfully, teachers need to balance language and subject content, making

sure both are taught equally instead of just focusing on the subject. CLIL endorses collaborative learning and deeper engagement with content and language, though empirical evidence in Nepal remains limited (Lochtman, 2021). Soft CLIL, which highlights language development, is effective when reinforced by engaging content and capable teachers with strong language skills (Mahan et al., 2018; Nakanishi & Nakanishi, 2016; Ikeda, 2021).

### **CLIL in the Nepali and International Educational Context**

CLIL holds strong potential for enhancing English language learning in Nepal, as replicated in current curricular modifications that integrate language and content, mostly through Soft CLIL activities in Grades IX and X textbooks (SEC, 2021); however, its actual application is constrained by inadequate teacher training, insufficient resources, and unsatisfactory institutional support (Neupane & Bhatt, 2023; Neupane & Joshi, 2022). International studies confirm that CLIL boosts learners' linguistic and subject knowledge but needs a careful balance between content and language and high teacher proficiency (Campillo et al., 2019; Czura & Anklewicz, 2018; Mahan & Norheim, 2021). Though scaffolding and interactive strategies can lessen challenges such as limited vocabulary and learner self-confidence (Rahmadhana, 2025; Mahan, 2022), empirical research on teachers' practices with CLIL in Nepal remains rare, highlighting the need for continued professional development and contextualized application to realize CLIL's pedagogical benefits (Somers & Linares, 2018; Neupane, 2023). Therefore, this study attempts to explore secondary school English language teachers' perspectives regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing CLIL in English language classrooms to address the research gap and update educational improvements. The study addresses the following research questions.

1. How do English language teachers perceive content and language-integrated learning?
2. What benefits and challenges do they encounter in engaging students in CLIL classrooms?

### **Methodology**

This research study used a qualitative research methodology, applying the narrative inquiry research design to explore participants' lived experiences through storytelling as sources of knowledge and understanding (Dahal et al., 2024). Narrative inquiry offers participants' deep understandings into culture, uniqueness and personal experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) by capturing stories through open-ended questions or interviews. To increase data richness, the stimulated recall technique (Gass & Mackey, 2016) was incorporated during in-depth interviews, allowing a deeper exploration of participants. Four secondary school English teachers having a minimum of two years of teaching experience at the secondary level from four schools located in Rupandehi, Nepal, were selected purposively to provide detailed information about participants' perceptions of CLIL (Chase, 2008; Cohen et al., 2017). Taking their consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to categorize repeated themes, followed by interpretation to reveal deeper meanings (Saldana, 2018; Creswell, 2013). The seven-stage data analysis process proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2023) was used to analyze the recorded data and generate meaning. The data they were compared with the original data and checked by participants. This assisted the researcher in providing a clear and complete

understanding of CLIL. Moreover, the interviews were conducted with prior knowledge and informed consent, guaranteeing secrecy and privacy of the data provided by the participants. To cover their identity, pseudonyms were used during the analysis and reporting of the findings.

## Findings and Discussion

Findings and discussion is presented under three main themes and sub-themes: Teachers' perspectives of CLIL, the benefits and challenges of implementing it in English language classrooms.

### Teachers' Perspectives of CLIL

Teachers' perspectives on CLIL highlight the importance of integrating language and subject teaching, nevertheless they face significant challenges due to limited training, resources, and time. Teachers' perspectives of CLIL focus on integrating language and subject teaching, fostering effective learning outcomes and professional competency. Mira asserted, *"As the secondary curriculum suggests, we give the main focus on language rather than content. Theoretically, I know CLIL, but I do not have a practical idea of using it in real class as I am not trained on it."* Mira explained that she adopts a communicative approach to teaching English to some extent and tries to implement it effectively. As a result, she prioritizes language over content. While she has theoretical knowledge of CLIL, she does not have practical experience in using it in the classroom since she has not experienced formal training.

Tara stated, *"I cannot use CLIL due to a lack of time, limited resources and a rigid syllabus that I have to finish in time."* Tara revealed that she is unable to use CLIL because of time constraints, limited resources, and the pressure to complete a rigid syllabus within the allotted time frame. Teachers' understanding of the CLIL approach remains limited in the Nepali ESL context, largely due to the dominance of communicative language teaching, which many teachers are not familiar with and trained in. Participants in this study identified key barriers to implementing CLIL, including insufficient professional development opportunities, inadequate training, lack of time, and limited resources. The challenges are in harmony with a previous study that highlights the need for teacher training, sufficient resources, and time distribution to facilitate effective CLIL integration (McDougald, 2015). Kabita stated, *"I know about CLIL and I can integrate content while teaching in class."* She claimed that she is aware of CLIL and integrates it into her English class.

Binod asserted, *"The existing textbook of grade 10 contains some exercises based on CLIL that are designed in an integrated way with another subject based on CLIL, but we are not provided with any training to implement it in class."* Without proper training, teachers struggle with the knowledge and skills needed to implement CLIL effectively. Binod's view highlights the probable gap between introducing a new curriculum and confirming adequate attention for teachers. They had a good understanding of CLIL as an effective method for teaching English through content. However, proper teacher training requires its successful implementation.

All participants showed positive perceptions towards CLIL as they recognized both the theoretical value and its capacity to improve language learning through content integration.

However, they need professional development opportunities as they have had inadequate time, restricted resources, and a lack of training for their effective application.

### **Benefits of Using CLIL in English Language Classrooms**

Content and language integrated learning improves learners' English proficiency by integrating language learning with content knowledge, which makes learning engaging, meaningful, and supportive.

### **Advancing Career and Skill Development**

Instructors need continuous professional development to maintain current career growth and address their students' needs. CLIL integrates subject learning with language learning, allowing teachers to enhance their skills, initiative professional growth and foster a conducive learning setting.

In this regard, Tara stated, *"CLIL supports students to improve their language proficiency with content knowledge, expands critical thinking and authentic communication skills."* She narrated that CLIL benefits English language classrooms by enhancing language proficiency, promoting subject knowledge, improving critical thinking, and fostering real-world communication skills. Tara's view is in harmony with Dzulnain et al. (2024). They mentioned that CLIL enhances language proficiency, strengthens subject comprehension, and cultivates critical thinking abilities compared to those in traditional subject-based instruction. Similarly, another participant, Mira stated, *"I involve students in group work on the assigned tasks, they use the English language."* She engages her students in allocated tasks through communicative activities. This is in agreement with Coyle (2007), who stated that CLIL integrates language and content learning, offering students opportunities to use the language in meaningful contexts.

Regarding the application of CLIL, the participants displayed divergent perceptions and practices. Although Mira showed a theoretical comprehension of CLIL, she lacked practical experience and, as a result of curriculum expectations and inadequate training, focused more on language than content. She took a communicative approach, although she was aware of her limits. Tara highlighted structural limitations over individual capacity when she explained that she was unable to use CLIL due to a strict syllabus, time limits, and limited resources. Kabita, on the other hand, distinguished herself by actively participating in CLIL, claiming to be aware of the methodology and integrating it into her instruction. She demonstrates a greater degree of practical application. She points out that existing textbooks to some extent have included CLIL-based activities, but Binod highlights the lack of teacher training to implement it in real classroom teaching.

### **Increasing Student Participation and Confidence**

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) increases both language learning and content knowledge of students. This focus enhances language proficiency and creates a foundation for effective communication. Mira stated, *"I have come across numerous texts that integrate content and language. For Grade 10, the newly introduced textbook also follows the CLIL*

approach, with many exercises designed to incorporate elements from other subjects in an integrated manner.” Mira shared her lived experience by teaching language through meaningful, subject-based contexts. Students develop improved vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills while practising integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills holistically.

In my class, Binod stated, “I engage my students in discussions with their peers, and they actively take part in group activities. All students participate actively in classroom tasks and feel confident answering questions.” He claims that their engagement improves their language skills and subject knowledge. His view is in harmony with Madrid Fernandez et al. (2019). They view CLIL as a modern, adaptable approach that fosters classroom innovation. They highlight its role in motivating students and enhancing engagement with new material. The study also focuses on the need for teacher training to effectively integrate subject and language instruction. Kabita mentioned, “I sometimes use the CLIL approach in the class to enhance the **language ability** of my students by involving them in authentic communication.” Her lived story shows that CLIL promotes deeper content understanding through integrated language and subject learning and fosters cultural awareness and interdisciplinary learning by exposing learners to diverse perspectives and academic disciplines.

She further stated, “My students are confident and motivated in sharing their opinions in English. They demonstrated confidence in using English, reflecting the positive effect on communication.” Her students are self-assured and eager to express their opinions in English. Their confident use of the language highlights its positive impact on communication. Regardless of their background, students develop the courage to express themselves in English. Participants’ views are similar to Czura and Anklewicz (2018), who emphasize that CLIL enhances learner motivation and language proficiency by pointing out the challenge of balancing content and language focus. This approach not only enhances language development but also strengthens the overall confidence and communication skills of students. Mira shared her experience thus, “CLIL promotes interaction, critical thinking and motivation, encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems while navigating between their native and target language.” Mira’s experience indicates that students increase motivation and engagement as they find relevance in the subject matter and enjoy the interactive, participatory nature of CLIL lessons. The research highlights its interactive nature, which fosters meaningful communication among learners and promotes shared understanding and values (Romanowski, 2018). This approach actively involves learners, making education both stimulating and rewarding.

The outcomes of CLIL allow students to simultaneously master content and improve their English proficiency, efficiently addressing educational goals. Moreover, by fostering cultural awareness and global competence, CLIL prepares students for a globalized world and enhances career diagnoses through mastery of English along with content knowledge. The participants’ experiences are consistent with Martinez (2020). CLIL benefits students in public schools by enhancing their cognitive, linguistic, and social skills.

CLIL encourages teamwork and communication among students. It also encourages partnerships between language and subject teachers. Moreover, CLIL fosters student autonomy

by promoting independent learning and research skills in them. Through contextual and meaningful learning, students recollect knowledge and language skills more efficiently. CLIL combines content mastery with language learning to enhance communication, critical thinking, and global readiness for both teachers and students (Kuravska & Bilianska, 2023). Thus, CLIL makes engaging, interactive, and actual educational setting that helps students' cognitive development, and academic growth for language learning. The participants agree that CLIL nurtures critical thinking, communication skills and expands language ability and content knowledge. CLIL is helpful on language, content learning and cognitive development (Coyle, 2007, Dzulkurnain et al. 2024)), Mira also believes in the integration of language and subject, highlighting group work to utilize English in meaningful ways. The participants accept the value of CLIL in promotion successful learning, highlighting the necessity of ongoing professional development for its successful implementation.

### **Challenges of Implementing CLIL in ELT**

Challenges of CLIL in ELT include a less engaging classroom environment. Inadequate teacher training and resources, language proficiency of students, limited teacher training, time and institutional constraints, and cultural and linguistic diversity of students can cause difficulties in effective instruction.

#### **Less Engaging Classroom Environment**

Creating a classroom environment that promotes real-life language use is essential for effective learning, yet many teachers struggle to provide authentic communication opportunities. Creating a classroom setting that reflects real-life language use is crucial for effective learning, yet many classrooms fall short of fostering authentic communication (Littlewood, 2014). In this line, Mira stated, *"I use the lecture method more than using communicative activities in the English classroom. My students usually do not get exposure to native speakers of English. So, my students get less exposure."* A lack of exposure to native speakers, minimal interactive activities, and reliance on lecture-based teaching can make language learning feel disconnected from practical application (Dörnyei, 2009). Deepa stated, *"I sometimes use role play and digital tools to involve students in learning."* The participant's narratives indicate that she engages her students in role play and digital tools. Her narratives align with Ellis (2003), who stated that integrating task-based learning, role-playing, and digital tools can help bridge this gap and enhance student engagement.

Although the participants' individual experiences show minor differences in emphasis and practice, their perceptions show a common understanding of CLIL's efficacy in improving language learning and subject knowledge. Mira draws attention to how language and content are integrated into textbooks and how CLIL promotes the development of all four language skills—vocabulary, grammar, and syntax—through relevant, subject-based settings. Binod emphasizes student involvement through group work and conversations, noting improved self-esteem and active involvement, which supports the idea that CLIL inspires students and

encourages creativity. Kabita exemplifies a more practical use of CLIL by stressing interdisciplinary learning, cultural sensitivity, and genuine communication. She adds that her pupils are driven and self-assured when speaking English. All participants appreciate CLIL's two-fold focus; however, Kabita emphasizes communicative competence and global awareness, Binod promotes engagement and participation, and Mira emphasizes the development of academic skills.

### **Inadequate Teacher Training and Resources**

Inclusive teacher training, adequate resources are required to address the challenges teachers face in integrating subject and language teaching. The need for targeted teacher training, administrative support, and curriculum adjustments is essential to facilitate CLIL integration (Paudel et al. 2024).

Mira stated, *"Since I do not have appropriate training and resources to use CLIL in English lessons. But I sometimes attempt to use CLIL in English lessons in my classrooms."* Teachers often face a lack of sufficient training and resources requiring expertise in both the subject matter and the target language, which is uncommon. Additionally, limited resources and unclear curriculum integration guidelines can hinder material development. Her ideas are consistent with Neupane (2023) and Neupane and Bhatt (2023). They found that there are limited professional development opportunities for teachers in Nepal. Deepa stated, *"My school does not provide me with the opportunities for receiving training and essential resources to implement CLIL in class."* Deepa narrated that her school does not offer the necessary training or resources for her to implement CLIL in the classroom. Her lived experience is in harmony with (Paudel et al., 2024). They found limited training, resource constraints, and rigid curricula as the hindrances to its adoption.

Regarding CLIL, Mira asserted, *"I am not provided with specific training on CLIL; however, last year, I attended curriculum orientation training provided by Education Training Centre Bhairahawa. The trainer talked about CLIL there, but the focus was not given to using it."* Mira has not received any specialised training on CLIL. However, last year, she participated in a curriculum-orientation training conducted by the Education Training Centre, Bhairahawa. During the session, the trainer mentioned CLIL, but there was no emphasis on its practical application in the classroom.

Teacher motivation is vital for student success, yet some teachers are hesitant to adopt new teaching methods. This reluctance often stems from heavy workloads, a lack of incentives, or inadequate training (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009). Studies indicate that schools with strong leadership and ongoing professional support are more likely to have actively engaged teachers who collaborate and explore innovative instructional strategies (Cenoz et al., 2014). One major problem in integrating language and content instruction is the limited access to suitable resources. Schools, especially in developing areas, often rely on outdated or inadequate teaching materials, which hampers the effectiveness of instruction (Coyle et al., 2010). The absence of engaging and authentic learning materials can reduce students' motivation and restrict their exposure to real-

world language applications (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Though their experiences and answers vary significantly, the participants' opinions show that they all have similar worries regarding the lack of proper training and resources for the successful implementation of CLIL.

### **Time and Institutional Constraints**

Creating suitable materials and resources requires significant time and effort. Institutional constraints, such as limited support, rigid syllabus and inadequate infrastructure, such as poor classroom management, can further complicate CLIL implementation.

Binod mentioned, *"We have overload every day, so we cannot prepare materials and lessons to balance the curriculum. Students' varied interests also hampers for their effective learning."* His lived experience makes it clear that the anxieties of widespread lesson preparation and the necessity to balance curriculum coverage, along with students' diversity. Motivation limited from diverse interests in content, can meaningfully influence their learning products. Mira shared her experience, *"I find it problematic to apply CLIL due to the rigid syllabus and poor classroom management."* She claimed rigid curriculum procedures, a prearranged syllabus, and poor classroom management hinder the flexible implementation of CLIL practices. Participants' replications reveal a increasing consciousness of the approach and its likely challenges.

### **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity of Students**

Cultural and linguistic diversity of students is vital in determining the efficacy of CLIL. In this context, Kabita stated, *"Students need multiple resources for better language learning such as videos and hands-on activities. Teachers have to inspire our students' collaboration through group work, interaction and presentations to reinforce their language skills."* By utilizing multimodal resources, such as videos and hands-on activities, teachers encourage interaction through group work, discussions, and presentations to strengthen students' language skills.

Mira shared her experience, thus, *"I cannot use CLIL in my class unless the authorities update the curriculum and provide specific training and resources. Moreover, there are fewer collaborative activities in our school."* Mira narrated to address the challenges, authorities have to update the curriculum and provide specialized teacher training programmes, provide CLIL-specific resources, and foster collaboration between students and subject teachers for CLIL's success. Students with limited language skills may find it challenging to understand complex subject concepts (Morton, 2016). Kabita stated, *"My students are poor in English, and they cannot grasp the information easily in a non-native language, which can create barriers."* She claimed that her students struggle with English and find it difficult to comprehend information in a non-native language, which can create obstacles to learning.

The challenges participants experienced demands a collaborative effort from educational authorities to offer thorough teacher training and update the curriculum to align more effectively with CLIL principles. By overcoming these obstacles, educators can create a more engaging and supportive atmosphere for CLIL implementation, enabling students to fully benefit from this approach.

## Conclusion and Implications

This study examined secondary school English language teachers' perspectives regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing CLIL in English language classrooms using a narrative research design. The findings of the study reveal teachers' positive perceptions of content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Its effective application improves students' confidence, engagement, language proficiency, critical thinking and content knowledge. Nevertheless, mixed-ability learners, inadequate training, a lack of resources, and a lack of time for preparation create some problems in its implementation. Teachers were found to have mixed perceptions in employing CLIL components in English class. Some of them used it without understanding whereas others had an in-depth understanding of it. Teacher's proficiency in the target language, institutional support, sufficient infrastructure, and continuous professional development are indispensable requirements for its successful implementation. In order to support successful CLIL practices, and advance multilingual education, prepare students for global contexts. Moreover, a fixed syllabus and poor classroom management hinder the flexible implementation of CLIL. Collaborative effort from educational authorities, providing resources, and support continuous professional development through adequate teacher training to update the curriculum to align more effectively with CLIL principles.

Curriculum reforms and increased engagement of educational authorities are required for its effective implementation. This study can contribute to improve the classroom pedagogy of the English language teachers and provide some insights to teachers, teacher trainers, syllabus designers, and material developers to build up materials for effective implementation of CLIL. There may be more research to be done on university teacher educators' perspectives of CLIL in English classes in Nepal. The generalizations drawn from this small-scale qualitative study, which included in-depth interviews with just four individuals in Rupandehi district, may not be valid or applicable. Therefore, a large-scale study utilizing new methods like surveys and classroom observation is required, encompassing a larger area and a large sample population. Furthermore, a mixed study design might be valuable to take into account for future studies.

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