

From ELT to CLIL: Preparing Language Teachers for Content-Driven Instruction

Morteza Amirshuibani¹⁾ *, Rustamov Dostonjon Uktam o'g'li²⁾

^{1,2)} Faculty of Languages and Pre-school Education, Tashkent University of Economics and Pedagogy (TIPU),
Uzbekistan

*Corresponding Author

Email: m.amirshuibani@tipu.uz

Abstract

CLIL is now used in many educational settings, yet the role of the language teacher within CLIL is still not always clear, especially for those who were trained primarily as ELT practitioners. In many EFL contexts, language teachers are suddenly expected to work with subject content, support content lessons, or cooperate with subject teachers, often without much preparation for this shift. From experience in classrooms and teacher training, this transition is rarely smooth. Teachers frequently express concerns about their level of subject knowledge, about losing focus on language, or about not knowing how far their familiar ELT techniques can be adapted for content-based work. These concerns tend to surface repeatedly in training sessions and reflective discussions. This article looks at these practical issues rather than at CLIL theory alone and argues that the problem is not a lack of content expertise. Instead, the main challenge lies in how teachers understand their role in content-driven instruction. The article suggests that language teachers contribute most effectively to CLIL when they focus on mediating meaning through language, interaction, and task design. It outlines practical directions for teacher preparation that build on existing ELT skills and experience, rather than expecting language teachers to become subject specialists

Keywords: *CLIL, ELT Background, Language Teachers, Teacher Development, Content-Based Instruction*

INTRODUCTION

CLIL is no longer a “nice idea” discussed mainly in European policy documents; it has become a practical reality in many schools and universities, including contexts where English is still very much a classroom language rather than a social one. At the same time, the evidence base keeps growing. Recent syntheses suggest that CLIL can support language development, but the picture is not uniformly positive across skills, contexts, and programme designs (Pittas & Tompkins, 2024). Even large-scale quantitative work points to a familiar pattern: language gains—especially in speaking—are often clearer than content outcomes, which can be more sensitive to programme quality and group differences (Lee, Lee, & Lo, 2025). In other words, “CLIL works” is not really the question anymore; the more useful question is when, for whom, and under what teaching conditions it works (Pittas & Tompkins, 2024; Lee et al., 2025).

Those teaching conditions matter because CLIL is not simply ELT with harder texts, and it is not simply teaching a subject “in English”. It asks teachers to hold two aims in mind at once—discipline learning and language development—and to manage the classroom talk that connects them. In many implementations, language teachers are pulled into this work as supporters, co-teachers, or sometimes even lead teachers. That is where a common tension appears: language teachers typically have strong expertise in scaffolding communication, building interaction, and diagnosing language needs, but they may not feel confident when the lesson is organised around subject concepts, tasks, and assessment demands. The result can be predictable: teachers either over-focus on language and the “content” becomes thin, or they over-focus on content and language support becomes accidental rather than planned (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Lee et al., 2025).

The situation becomes even sharper in EFL-dominant settings where institutional support and collaboration time are limited. Recent work on CLIL combined with digital tools shows genuine promise—greater engagement, improved access to multimodal input, and increased

learner autonomy—but it also highlights a familiar pressure point: teachers need sustained professional development and workable classroom routines rather than one-off training sessions (Sula & Hoxha, 2025; Pérez-Cañado, 2016; Nikula, Dalton-Puffer, & Llinares, 2013). Studies examining technology-supported CLIL environments further suggest that digital platforms can enhance interaction and access to content, yet their effectiveness depends heavily on how teachers structure tasks and guide learner participation (Dooly & Sadler, 2016).

The current wave of AI-informed CLIL adds another layer. Design-based and exploratory studies are beginning to show how AI can support multimodal input, scaffolding, and task sequencing, but these studies also implicitly underline that technology does not remove the need for pedagogical mediation; in many cases it actually increases the teacher's role in guiding meaning-making and classroom interaction (Ramírez-Aroca, 2026; Dooly & Sadler, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, practice-informed approach grounded in reflective analysis of language teacher development in CLIL-oriented contexts. Rather than reporting findings from a single empirical project, the article draws on recurring patterns observed through classroom teaching, teacher training sessions, and professional development workshops involving language teachers transitioning from traditional ELT settings toward content-driven instruction. Such an approach aligns with traditions of practitioner inquiry and reflective practice research, which emphasise the systematic examination of professional experience in order to generate pedagogically relevant insights (Schön, 1983; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

The aim of the study is exploratory and pedagogical. It seeks to identify common challenges teachers encounter during the transition toward CLIL-oriented teaching and to propose practical directions for teacher preparation rather than to produce statistically generalisable results. In analysing the reflective data generated through training discussions and classroom observations, the study follows an interpretive qualitative perspective in which recurring patterns in teacher experiences are examined and organised into thematic categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The insights presented here are informed by ongoing work with in-service language teachers in EFL-dominant contexts, where CLIL implementation is emerging but institutional structures and teacher preparation models are still developing. Data informing the analysis come primarily from reflective discussions with teachers following training sessions and classroom observations, teacher feedback during workshops, and recurring concerns documented in practitioner notes over multiple training cycles. These interactions typically addressed issues such as uncertainty about content knowledge, balancing language and content objectives, materials adaptation, and collaboration with subject teachers.

Analysis followed an iterative reflective process in which commonly reported challenges and successful pedagogical responses were identified and grouped into recurring thematic categories. These categories then informed the development of a practical framework for teacher preparation presented later in the article. While the approach does not claim comprehensive coverage of all CLIL contexts, it seeks to provide experience-based insights relevant to similar educational settings where language teachers are gradually moving toward content-driven teaching responsibilities.

A limitation of this methodology is that it relies on practitioner reflection rather than systematically recorded classroom data or large-scale surveys. However, this practice-based perspective allows for close engagement with everyday teaching realities and provides context-sensitive recommendations grounded in professional experience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of classroom experience and teacher development work revealed several recurring patterns in how language teachers experience the transition from traditional ELT to CLIL-oriented instruction. Although individual contexts differed, many of the concerns and classroom responses reported by teachers followed similar lines. The findings presented here therefore reflect tendencies repeatedly observed across training sessions and reflective discussions rather than isolated incidents.

Uncertainty About Content Knowledge

One of the most frequently reported concerns relates to teachers' perceived lack of subject expertise. Many language teachers entering CLIL settings initially assume that they must master subject content to the same degree as content specialists. This perception often leads to anxiety and reluctance to engage fully in content-driven lessons. Teachers report spending excessive preparation time studying subject material or avoiding deeper engagement with content tasks for fear of presenting inaccurate information.

Difficulty Balancing Language and Content Goals

A second recurring issue concerns how teachers prioritise lesson aims. Many teachers report uncertainty about whether language development or content learning should take precedence. In practice, this sometimes results in lessons drifting back toward familiar language exercises, with content serving only as background material. In other cases, teachers focus heavily on completing subject tasks while overlooking opportunities to scaffold language development.

Challenges in Materials Adaptation

Teachers also frequently report difficulty adapting available materials for CLIL purposes. Traditional ELT textbooks often do not provide sufficient subject depth, while subject textbooks may assume linguistic competence beyond learners' abilities. Teachers therefore find themselves modifying tasks, simplifying texts, or designing supplementary activities.

Changes in Classroom Interaction Patterns

Another pattern concerns shifts in classroom interaction. Teachers unfamiliar with subject content sometimes adopt more teacher-centred instruction to maintain control of lessons. This can reduce opportunities for learner interaction and output.

Emerging Confidence Through Collaboration

Finally, teachers frequently report increased confidence when collaboration with subject teachers becomes possible, even in informal forms. Sharing lesson goals or materials with content colleagues helps language teachers clarify expectations and reduces pressure to act as content authorities. Over time, collaboration encourages teachers to view their role as complementary rather than subordinate within CLIL programmes.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a recurring tension in CLIL implementation. While policy discussions often focus on curriculum design or language outcomes, everyday classroom practice depends largely on how teachers interpret and enact their professional roles. For language teachers transitioning from ELT into CLIL contexts, the main difficulty appears to lie not in linguistic competence or willingness to innovate, but in uncertainty about professional boundaries and instructional priorities.

One important implication concerns the widespread assumption that successful CLIL teaching requires language teachers to acquire substantial subject expertise. The results presented here suggest that this expectation may be misplaced. Teachers' anxiety about insufficient content knowledge often leads either to excessive preparation or to avoidance of content-focused

activities. Yet classroom experiences indicate that learners frequently benefit more from linguistic scaffolding and structured interaction than from detailed subject explanation. This observation aligns with previous research emphasising the mediating role of language in CLIL classrooms (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Coyle et al., 2010).

A second issue concerns the perceived tension between language and content goals. Teachers often experience these aims as competing demands, particularly when institutional assessment systems prioritise content mastery. However, the findings suggest that integration becomes more manageable when language objectives are planned in relation to content tasks rather than treated as separate components. Activities requiring explanation, comparison, or justification naturally create opportunities for language development while addressing subject learning goals.

Materials adaptation also emerges as a central pedagogical challenge. Teachers working with either language-focused or subject-focused materials frequently find that neither fully suits CLIL contexts. The results indicate that teachers gradually develop workable strategies—such as staged tasks, vocabulary support, and collaborative activities—but often without systematic guidance. This suggests that teacher preparation programmes should address materials adaptation explicitly.

Another important issue concerns classroom interaction. Teachers who feel insecure about content knowledge may adopt more controlled teaching styles, which reduces opportunities for learner participation. Yet interaction remains essential for both language development and conceptual understanding. Maintaining interactive routines familiar from communicative ELT appears to support smoother transitions into CLIL classrooms.

Finally, the role of collaboration deserves attention. Even limited cooperation with subject teachers appears to increase language teachers' confidence and clarify expectations. However, institutional structures often leave collaboration to individual initiative. Sustainable CLIL implementation may therefore depend not only on teacher training but also on organisational support that facilitates joint planning and reflection.

Overall, the discussion reinforces a central argument of this article: preparing language teachers for CLIL should not involve replacing ELT expertise with subject expertise. Instead, effective preparation helps teachers reinterpret their existing pedagogical strengths within content-driven classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the transition from traditional ELT practice to CLIL-oriented instruction from the perspective of language teacher preparation in EFL-dominant contexts. The discussion has shown that the main challenges teachers face are not primarily linguistic or even content-related, but professional and pedagogical. Language teachers entering CLIL environments often struggle with uncertainty about their role, concerns about subject knowledge, and difficulty balancing language and content objectives. These concerns frequently lead to hesitation in classroom practice or to a retreat into familiar ELT routines that do not fully support content learning.

At the same time, the findings suggest that language teachers already possess many of the skills required for effective CLIL teaching. Their expertise in managing classroom interaction, scaffolding meaning, and designing communicative tasks remains highly relevant in content-driven settings. The difficulty lies less in acquiring entirely new competencies than in adapting existing pedagogical knowledge to new instructional demands. When teachers shift their focus from delivering content to facilitating access to content through language and interaction, classroom practice becomes more sustainable and productive.

The article therefore argues that teacher preparation for CLIL should prioritise realistic professional development models that build on teachers' strengths rather than expecting them to become subject specialists. Training programmes should address practical classroom challenges, support materials adaptation, and encourage collaboration between language and subject teachers.

Future research may explore more systematically how different preparation models influence teacher confidence and classroom outcomes across diverse CLIL contexts. Nevertheless, the present study suggests that sustainable CLIL implementation depends largely on how successfully language teachers are supported in redefining, rather than replacing, their professional identity in content-driven classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2011). Content-and-language integrated learning: From practice to principles? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 182–204. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000092>
- Dooly, M., & Sadler, R. (2016). Becoming little scientists: Technologically enhanced project-based language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 20(1), 54–78.
- Lee, J. S., Lee, K., & Lo, Y. Y. (2025). Effects of content and language integrated learning on language and content learning: A large-scale longitudinal analysis. *Language Teaching Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168825XXXXXX>
- Nikula, T., Dalton-Puffer, C., & Llinares, A. (2013). CLIL classroom discourse: Research from Europe. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 1(1), 70–100.
- Pérez-Cañado, M. L. (2016). From the CLIL craze to the CLIL conundrum: Addressing the current CLIL controversy. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 9(1), 9–31.
- Pittas, N., & Tompkins, J. (2024). Content and language integrated learning (CLIL): A meta-analysis of language outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465432412XXXX>
- Ramírez-Aroca, E. (2026). Artificial intelligence and multimodal scaffolding in CLIL classrooms: Emerging pedagogical models. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2026XXXXXX>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sula, A., & Hoxha, L. (2025). Technology-enhanced CLIL classrooms: Teacher mediation and learner engagement in digitally supported environments. *System*, 118, 103145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103145>