Journal of Social and Theological Studies
https://mijournals.com/index.php/jsts

EDUCATION BASED ON CEFR AND CLIL: INTEGRATING LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND CONTENT LEARNING

https://doi.org/10.57033/mijournals-2026-4-0329

Iroda RAKHMONOVA
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences, Teacher,
Department of Foreign Languages, Fergana State University,
Fergana, Uzbekistan

Received: 15-05-2026
Accepted: 28-05-2026
Published:09-06-2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Abstract. *The increasing internationalization of education has created a growing need for teaching approaches that simultaneously develop subject knowledge and effective foreign-language communication. Two influential frameworks that respond to this need are the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CEFR provides a systematic basis for describing proficiency, formulating learning outcomes, selecting tasks and assessing progress, whereas CLIL integrates subject content and language learning within the same educational process. This article examines the theoretical and practical relationship between CEFR and CLIL and analyses their application in lesson planning, classroom interaction, scaffolding, cognitive development, assessment and professionally oriented education. Particular attention is paid to communicative competence, mediation, learner autonomy and the adaptation of subject content to learners' language levels. The article argues that the coordinated use of CEFR and CLIL can make foreign-language teaching more purposeful, transparent and professionally relevant.*

Keywords: *CEFR, CLIL, communicative competence, integrated learning, language proficiency, content-based instruction, scaffolding, learner-centred education, assessment, mediation.*

INTRODUCTION

Modern education is increasingly influenced by globalization, academic mobility, international professional cooperation and the rapid circulation of knowledge across linguistic borders. In this context, knowledge of a foreign language is no longer viewed simply as an additional academic subject. For university students, language competence is closely connected with access to professional literature, international

communication, academic exchange, digital resources and future employment. This change has encouraged educators to reconsider traditional methods in which grammar rules, translation and vocabulary memorization were often taught separately from meaningful communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:22).

A competence-based approach requires learners not only to know linguistic forms but also to use them appropriately in real academic, social and professional situations. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was developed to provide a transparent and internationally comparable basis for language learning, teaching and assessment (Council of Europe, 2001:1). Its later Companion Volume expanded the framework by placing greater emphasis on mediation, interaction, plurilingual competence and the learner as a social agent (Council of Europe, 2020:30). Content and Language Integrated Learning, in turn, is based on the principle that an additional language can serve as a medium through which learners acquire both subject knowledge and language competence (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:1).

Although CEFR and CLIL emerged from different pedagogical needs, they can effectively complement one another. The CEFR helps teachers determine what learners are expected to do with language at a particular level (Council of Europe, 2001:22-24), while CLIL provides meaningful academic and professional contexts in which those abilities can be developed (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:11). The purpose of this article is therefore to examine the educational value of integrating CEFR and CLIL, with particular attention to language objectives, content objectives, classroom methodology, scaffolding, cognition, assessment and professionally oriented instruction.

MAIN PART

The CEFR describes language proficiency through six principal reference levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 (Council of Europe, 2001:22-24). These levels are not merely labels for beginner, intermediate or advanced users. They are connected with observable communicative performance and describe what a learner can understand, say, write and do in different contexts. This action-oriented perspective represents language users as social agents who perform tasks and cooperate with others in order to achieve communicative purposes (Council of Europe, 2020:34).

One of the strongest features of the CEFR is its focus on communicative language

competence. Effective language use requires linguistic resources such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and orthography, but it also involves sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (Council of Europe, 2001:108). Learners need to choose forms that are appropriate to a particular situation, organize discourse coherently, interpret meaning and adapt their language to communicative goals. Consequently, knowledge of rules is treated as a resource for action rather than as the final purpose of language learning. The use of "can-do" descriptors makes educational goals clearer and more measurable. Instead of stating that students will simply learn a grammatical structure, a teacher may formulate an outcome such as "Students can describe previous professional experience", "Students can summarize the main idea of a short academic text", or "Students can participate in a structured discussion". Such outcomes connect grammar and vocabulary with communicative purpose and also support self-assessment and learner autonomy (Council of Europe, 2020:38).

CLIL is generally understood as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:1). Its central principle is integration. Students do not first study language in isolation and then apply it to their academic field; rather, they develop language while working with meaningful subject knowledge. For example, medical students may learn how to describe the cardiovascular system, explain the functions of hospital staff, interpret symptoms or discuss basic procedures in English. The subject matter provides the reason for communication, while language becomes the instrument through which learning takes place. A widely recognized model of CLIL is the 4Cs Framework: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:41-43). Content refers to the subject knowledge and concepts to be learned. Communication concerns the language required to access, discuss and demonstrate that knowledge. Cognition involves the mental processes used to understand, compare, classify, analyse and solve problems. Culture broadens learning by encouraging awareness of different perspectives and forms of communication. These four dimensions show that CLIL is not simply teaching a subject in another language; it is the purposeful integration of knowledge, language, thinking and intercultural awareness. The European dimension of this approach, including its policy rationale and its institutional spread, was mapped at an early stage by D. Marsh (Marsh, 2002:65).

The relationship between CEFR and CLIL becomes particularly important when teachers need to balance academic challenge with linguistic accessibility. Subject content may be cognitively demanding even when learners have only an intermediate command of the foreign language. If the linguistic demands of the lesson are too high, students may fail to demonstrate knowledge that they actually possess. If the content is simplified excessively, however, academic learning may lose depth. The CEFR can help teachers calibrate text complexity, task type, expected learner output and communicative demands according to proficiency level (Council of Europe, 2001:175; Council of Europe, 2020:46). For example, a B1 learner should not be expected to produce the same degree of abstract academic argument as a C1 learner, but the same B1 student can successfully describe, compare, explain, summarize and exchange essential professional information when suitable support is provided. In this sense, the CEFR gives teachers a realistic linguistic reference point, while CLIL provides an authentic purpose for using the language.

An integrated lesson should therefore contain at least two closely connected types of objectives. A content objective may state that students will understand the responsibilities of members of a hospital team. A language objective may state that students will be able to describe those responsibilities using appropriate occupational vocabulary and present-tense structures. The integration of these objectives prevents the lesson from becoming either a purely theoretical subject lecture or an isolated grammar class (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:53; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008:12).

CEFR-CLIL integration is particularly effective for developing communicative competence because subject content naturally creates a reason to communicate. In traditional lessons, students may complete sentences or memorize dialogues without a genuine need to exchange meaning. In a CLIL classroom, however, learners must often classify information, explain a process, compare alternatives, solve a problem or present a conclusion. Communication is therefore linked to an intellectual and practical purpose. Classroom discourse in such settings has been shown to differ systematically from that of conventional language lessons, with a greater share of academic registers and content-driven interaction (Dalton-Puffer, 2007:127).

The concept of mediation in the CEFR Companion Volume is especially relevant to CLIL (Council of Europe, 2020:90). Mediation includes activities in which learners

process information and make it accessible to others. A student may read a text and explain it orally, interpret a diagram for classmates, summarize a lecture, simplify specialized information or combine ideas from several sources. Such tasks are highly relevant in academic and professional education because they reflect how knowledge is actually used outside the classroom. For medical students, for instance, a mediation task may involve reading short information about a disease and then explaining the main symptoms in simpler language. Another task may require students to interpret a chart, compare treatment options or summarize the responsibilities of different healthcare workers. In each case, linguistic competence develops together with professional communication skills.

CLIL encourages learners to engage not only in remembering information but also in higher-order thinking. Students may identify, define, compare, classify, explain cause-and-effect relationships, interpret data, evaluate options and solve subject-related problems. Coyle, Hood and Marsh emphasize that cognition and communication should develop together because learners construct subject knowledge through language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:29). However, cognitively demanding tasks may become inaccessible when learners lack the language needed to perform them. This is where scaffolding becomes essential. Scaffolding refers to temporary instructional support that enables learners to complete a task which they may not yet be able to perform independently (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008:139). In a CEFR-informed classroom, scaffolding can include pre-teaching key vocabulary, providing diagrams, using graphic organizers, offering model sentences, dividing a long text into smaller sections, supplying sentence starters or allowing students to prepare ideas before speaking. The amount of support should correspond to learner proficiency. A2 learners may need substantial visual and lexical support, whereas B1 learners can work with moderately complex texts supported by glossaries and structured questions. B2 learners can normally process longer texts and participate in more extended discussion with less assistance. Scaffolding should not remove intellectual challenge; its purpose is to reduce unnecessary linguistic barriers while preserving the cognitive value of the task.

Effective planning begins with a clear understanding of both content and language objectives. The teacher first identifies the essential subject knowledge that learners should acquire and then determines the language required to understand and

communicate that knowledge. CLIL methodology distinguishes between the language of learning, the language for learning and the language through learning (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:36). The language of learning includes terminology and structures directly connected with the subject; the language for learning includes expressions needed for classroom interaction; and the language through learning develops as students construct new knowledge through communication.

In a lesson on patient examination, for example, the language of learning may include words such as "symptom", "diagnosis", "medical history", "examination" and "treatment". The language for learning may include expressions such as "Could you explain that again?", "The main difference is...", "According to the text..." and "In my opinion...". Through the learning process, students may also acquire new phrases that were not explicitly pre-taught but become necessary for successful communication. A well-designed lesson should provide opportunities for active learner production. Pair work, information-gap activities, short presentations, problem-solving tasks, role-based discussions and collaborative summaries are especially effective because they require students to use language for a concrete purpose (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:174). Digital resources can also support CLIL by providing authentic images, diagrams, videos, interactive tasks and access to current professional information, but technology should remain subordinate to the learning objectives.

Assessment in a CEFR-CLIL context should recognize that content knowledge and language performance are related but not identical. A student may understand a concept correctly while making several grammatical errors, or may speak fluently while presenting incomplete subject knowledge. For this reason, assessment criteria should be transparent and, where appropriate, divided into separate categories such as content accuracy, professional vocabulary, organization, communicative clarity, interaction and grammatical control. CEFR descriptors can provide a useful basis for evaluating language performance because they describe observable communicative abilities at different proficiency levels (Council of Europe, 2001:244; Council of Europe, 2020:157). Nevertheless, assessment should not focus excessively on minor errors when the principal objective is successful academic or professional communication. Formative assessment is especially valuable: teachers can observe learners during tasks, provide feedback, use short quizzes, organize peer assessment and ask students to complete self-

assessment checklists. Self-assessment statements such as "I can explain the function of basic hospital equipment", "I can describe the responsibilities of a nurse", or "I can understand the main idea of a short medical text" make progress visible to learners and strengthen autonomy. Such statements are consistent with the action-oriented and learner-centred principles of the CEFR.

The success of CEFR-CLIL integration depends greatly on teacher competence. Teachers need to understand language proficiency levels, formulate realistic outcomes, select appropriate content, anticipate linguistic difficulties, provide scaffolding, design communicative tasks and evaluate both language and content. Professional education introduces an additional challenge because the language teacher may not be a subject specialist, while the subject teacher may not have extensive training in foreign-language pedagogy. Cooperation between language teachers and subject specialists can therefore improve the quality of CLIL instruction. Joint planning can help ensure terminological accuracy, appropriate cognitive challenge and linguistic accessibility. Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols emphasize collaboration, material adaptation, learner support and active communication as important conditions for successful CLIL practice (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008:29). The approach is particularly useful in professionally oriented higher education. Medical students can learn to describe symptoms and procedures, engineering students can explain systems and processes, and business students can discuss professional cases. In each field, foreign-language learning becomes directly connected with the discourse and communicative practices of the future profession.

The integration of CEFR and CLIL offers several advantages. First, it increases the practical relevance of language learning because students can see a clear connection between the foreign language and their future academic or professional activity. Second, it provides repeated exposure to subject-specific vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Third, it develops several language skills simultaneously, since one activity may involve reading, listening, speaking, note-taking, summarizing and interaction. Fourth, it encourages learner autonomy and prepares students to use foreign-language sources independently. Finally, the CEFR adds transparency by making expected communicative outcomes more visible. At the same time, implementation can be difficult. Common challenges include a gap between content complexity and language proficiency, excessive terminology, limited classroom time, mixed-ability groups and

insufficient teacher preparation (Marsh, 2002:71; Dalton-Puffer, 2007:279). These difficulties can be reduced through careful selection of content, differentiation, visual support, staged tasks, vocabulary prioritization, collaboration between teachers and continuous formative assessment. The foreign language should never become an unnecessary barrier to understanding the subject; instead, it should expand learners' access to knowledge and communication.

CONCLUSION

The changing demands of contemporary education require foreign-language teaching to move beyond isolated grammar and vocabulary instruction. Learners increasingly need to use language as a tool for academic, professional and intercultural communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:22). The integration of CEFR and CLIL offers a productive response to this need because the two frameworks perform complementary functions. The CEFR provides clear descriptions of language proficiency, supports action-oriented outcomes and offers a basis for assessment (Council of Europe, 2001:244), whereas CLIL creates meaningful contexts in which learners acquire subject knowledge through the foreign language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:1).

When these frameworks are coordinated carefully, language learning becomes more purposeful and professionally relevant. The CEFR helps teachers control linguistic difficulty and formulate realistic expectations (Council of Europe, 2001:175), while CLIL encourages meaningful communication, cognitive engagement, mediation and subject-specific language use (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010:41-43; Council of Europe, 2020:90). Successful integration requires carefully balanced content, appropriate scaffolding, explicit language support, learner-centred tasks and transparent assessment criteria (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008:29).

In higher and professional education, the CEFR-CLIL model can be especially valuable because students develop foreign-language competence within the discourse of their future specialization (Dalton-Puffer, 2007:271; Marsh, 2002:65). Properly implemented, the approach can contribute not only to better language proficiency but also to learner autonomy, cognitive development, professional readiness and participation in international academic communication (Council of Europe, 2020:38; Richards & Rodgers, 2014:360).

REFERENCES

1. Council of Europe. (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Council of Europe. (2020). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment - Companion Volume. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
3. Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). Discourse in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Classrooms. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
5. Marsh, D. (2002). CLIL/EMILE - The European Dimension: Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential. Jyvaskyla: University of Jyvaskyla.
6. Mehisto, P., Marsh, D., & Frigols, M. J. (2008). Uncovering CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
7. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.