

Application and Challenges of CLIL in English Language Oral Teaching in a Bilingual Fashion Design Course

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Abstract

The study explores the application of CLIL in English language oral teaching within a bilingual fashion design course in China. This study will explore the challenges in applying CLIL as perceived by one teacher and six students provided in the semi-structured interviews. It highlights challenges in oral skills, vocabulary development, and professional knowledge. Findings suggest that simplifying grammar, emphasizing vocabulary, and providing sentence patterns can aid student communication. Among the pedagogical implications are the integration of CLIL in bilingual courses, increased teacher training in CLIL, and improved institutional support. Long-term studies are needed to evaluate CLIL's sustained impact and application.

Keywords: CLIL Pedagogy, Oral Teaching, Application and Challenges, Bilingual Fashion Course

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1.0 Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach that combines content instruction with language learning, facilitating both subject-specific and linguistic competencies (Codó, 2023; Coyle, 2018). In bilingual education, CLIL plays a crucial role by enabling students to gain subject knowledge while simultaneously improving their second-language skills (Codó, 2022; Mehisto et al., 2008).

Bilingual fashion design teaching focuses on creative expression, technical skills, and intercultural communication, leveraging CLIL frameworks for oral English teaching (Coyle et al., 2010). This approach is conducive to improving students' abilities to present subject concepts in both their native and target language, engage in collaborative discussions, and communicate ideas clearly and effectively (Evnitskaya & Dalton-Puffer, 2023; Pérez Cañado & Lancaster, 2017). However, the adoption of CLIL in bilingual fashion courses poses challenges like balancing language with content, addressing varied linguistic skills, and aligning strategies with fashion education. This study explores these challenges in enhancing oral skills and strategies to overcome barriers in integrated teaching.

Chinese-English bilingual education has much room for development compared to traditional English teaching, driven by the demand for globalized education (Sun, 2024). The Ministry of Education (MOE) has emphasized the importance of integrating English with subject-specific learning to enhance students' competitiveness in international fields (Liu & Chong, 2023). In creative disciplines like

fashion design, bilingual education prepares students to meet global market demands and emphasizes communication, cultural sensitivity, and technical expertise (Bukantaitė & Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė, 2021).

Bilingual fashion education is essential to cultivating professionals with international perspectives and cross-cultural skills as China advances fashion education and international cooperation (Chen, 2019). However, bilingual fashion education still faces challenges in course curriculum coherence, teaching methods, and resource availability. Additionally, students' language proficiency, learning awareness, and attitudes further complicate its implementation (Sun, 2024).

While CLIL has demonstrated success in business English and engineering, its application in bilingual fashion design education still needs to be explored. Combining bilingual oral teaching with professional knowledge in this globalized and trendy profession provides unique opportunities and challenges worth studying.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 CLIL: Theoretical Foundations and Core Principles

CLIL, introduced by David Marsh and Anne Maljers (1994), integrates content teaching and language learning, offering a dual-focus pedagogy that simultaneously enhances subject-specific knowledge and language proficiency (Concezzi, 2017). Key principles of CLIL include the "4Cs Framework": Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. This framework emphasizes that learning should be content-driven, communication-oriented, cognitively engaging, and culturally enriching. The core of CLIL lies in the role of community within the 4C framework, the development of cognitive growth and critical thinking skills, and the pivotal importance of language and its functions in the learning process (Coyle et al., 2010).

2.2 CLIL in Bilingual Education at Chinese Universities

Chinese universities have adopted CLIL across disciplines such as English, business, engineering, and the arts to support the internationalization of higher education (Hu et al., 2023). These bilingual courses aim to prepare students for success in global academic and professional contexts. Research indicates that CLIL pedagogy can improve students' academic performance, attitudes, intercultural communication skills, etc. (Echiverri & Lane, 2019). However, despite its significant advantage, the adoption of CLIL in Chinese higher education faces challenges. Zhang (2021) and Tan (2020) highlight key deficiencies in bilingual education, including a shortage of teachers with subject expertise and language skills, weak team building, insufficient teaching materials, and incomplete objectives and assessment systems. These issues hinder the advancement and broader adoption of bilingual education.

2.3 CLIL to Enhance Students' English Oral Skills

CLIL pedagogy has developed into an educational concept that integrates subject content and language learning, enhances students' oral skills through authentic input and innovative environments, and lays the foundation for global career development. Llinares and McCabe (2023) emphasize the close connection between systemic functional linguistics and CLIL pedagogy and provide a theoretical framework and tools to help educators understand how students use language to convey meaning and participate in subject content. Cabral and Lessa (2020) suggest that CLIL is vital for developing second-language skills, fostering motivation, and enhancing critical thinking. Hu (2021) highlights that CLIL creates a natural environment where subject learning advances language proficiency.

2.4 Fashion Design Students' Current English Oral Skills

Oral skills are vital for conveying, receiving, and expressing information (Kosdian, 2016), equipping fashion design students with a competitive edge in international settings. However, Chinese fashion students often struggle with their English oral skills, particularly in areas such as public speaking, sharing traditional Chinese clothing culture, and collaborating with foreign designers. Many struggle with problem-solving, oral communication, and creative thinking (Husna, 2022). To address these gaps, bilingual fashion courses should integrate subject content with language learning and adopt practice-oriented teaching methods to enhance students' expression, cross-cultural communication, and global perspectives (Liu, 2023). Additionally, overcoming subject complexity and language barriers is essential for effective bilingual education.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research on CLIL, studies focusing on its application in art-based design studies disciplines like fashion design are limited. Specifically, pedagogical research has not sufficiently explored the CLIL-based teaching of English oral skills in bilingual fashion environments. However, the CLIL approach's focus on communication and critical thinking can enhance students' ability to express their opinions and analyze critically by encouraging them to actively participate in discipline-specific activities. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by identifying the perceptions and challenges of teaching CLIL-based oral English in a bilingual fashion design program. To answer the research objective, the research questions are:

Research Question 1: What strategies are used by the teacher and students in applying CLIL to English oral teaching within bilingual fashion design courses in China?

Research Question 2: What challenges did the teacher and students face in applying CLIL for English oral teaching within a bilingual fashion design course in China?

3.0 Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed to explore the application and challenges of CLIL in a bilingual fashion design course. Qualitative methods provide insights into complex pedagogical phenomena and assess the effectiveness of teaching methods. The subjective experiences of teachers and students reveal their perceptions and challenges, helping to improve CLIL teaching practices.

3.1 Participants

This study employs purposive sampling to interview the teacher and students involved in applying the CLIL bilingual fashion design course. The class that applied CLIL teaching consisted of a CLIL bilingual fashion teacher and 38 students, who are from a fashion design university in Jiangxi Province, China. Among them, the CLIL bilingual teacher and six students participated in the interviews.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

This study uses customized semi-structured interview questions as the research instrument, based on the validity and reliability proven in previous research. Linguistics and fashion education experts reviewed and meticulously adjusted the questions to ensure they aligned with the specific context of bilingual fashion education in Jiangxi.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The interview data were collected to gain insights into the perception, experiences, and challenges of the teacher and the students regarding the teaching and learning of English oral skills in CLIL. The interviews covered teaching strategies and learning situations. Subsequently, the data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 14. After transcribing the interview recordings, the data were repeatedly read, and themes were extracted through open coding and axial coding, followed by detailed analysis.

4.0 Findings

Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative interview data from one CLIL teacher and six students in a bilingual fashion design course, focusing on the application and challenges of CLIL teaching. The findings of the study indicated that the teacher adequately analyzed and applied the CLIL pedagogical framework in English oral skills teaching. She designed and adopted coping strategies to address the limitations and challenges encountered in the implementation process. Additionally, the students reported that the CLIL pedagogy helped to enhance their English oral skills and demonstrated positive attitudes and perceptions of coping with challenges in the learning process.

4.1 Research Question 1: What strategies are used by teachers and students in applying CLIL to English oral teaching within bilingual fashion design courses in China?

a. Strategies for the teacher to implement CLIL pedagogy in a bilingual fashion design course are necessary to teach English oral skills. These strategies focus on implementing the CLIL pedagogy to develop students' English oral skills and are grouped into three main themes, as in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Categories with the Strategies by the Teacher Implementing the CLIL Oral Teaching

	Open Coding	Axial Coding (Categories)	Themes
1	Use New Words and Sentence Patterns, Pictures to Enhance Perception and Impression of Vocabulary, Play Guessing Games During the Induction Phase, Use Word Formation Associations and Memory to Recognize English Words, Preview Vocabulary on Handouts.	Teach Vocabulary Strategies	CLIL Oral Teaching Strategies
2	Guide Students to Discover Grammar Rules on Their Own. Self-Supplement and Self-Correction, No Emphasis on Grammar Teaching.	Teach Grammar Strategies	
3	Error Correction and Feedback Improve Pronunciation, Provide Transition Words and Sentence Patterns Improve Fluency and Coherence, Listen and Read More Pronunciation Improvement Training.	Teach Fluency, Coherence and Pronunciation Strategies	
4	Practice With Frame-Based Content Exercises, Listening Gap-Fill Exercises.	Teach Content Organization Strategies	
5	Content Analyses and Condenses, Mind Map Guide for Frame Content, Handouts.	Rationalize of Content Strategies	CLIL 4Cs Teaching Strategies
6	Problem-Based Guides Students to Think and Discuss, Linking the Teaching Content with the Cultural Fit Points, Experiencing Culture Through Content, Establishing Cultural Background Themes, Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Texts, Students Choosing Their Own Related Cultural Topics.	Culture Teaching Strategies	
7	Role-Play, Q & A, Group Discussions, Free Talk.	Communication Teaching Strategies	
8	Mind Maps Guide Cognition, Students Imitate Analysis and Oral Output, Content Output Cultivates Ability, Students Imitate Text Analysis and Processing.	Cognition Teaching Strategies	
9	Language Aids Understanding of Content, Supplements Basic Knowledge, Encourages Speaking, English Focuses on Basic Content, Frames English Vocabulary and Sentence Patterns.	Language Teaching Strategies	Content-Language Balance Strategies
10	The ratio of content to English is 6:4.	Balance the Content and Language Ratio	

Theme 1: CLIL Oral Teaching Strategies

This theme highlights CLIL English oral teaching strategies. Open coding shows that the teacher used diverse vocabulary methods to enhance students' grasp of professional terms, with handouts for preparation. Error correction focused on grammar and pronunciation,

though grammar teaching was secondary. Transition words and sentence patterns were provided to boost fluency and coherence. Frame-based content and gap-fill exercises helped improve content organization skills.

Theme 2: CLIL 4Cs Teaching Strategies

This theme highlights the CLIL teacher's approach to designing oral teaching content in alignment with the 4Cs framework. Open coding reveals that CLIL teaching integrates structured thinking, guided exploration, and fashion culture themes. Strategies like simulations and imitation-based examples are used to enhance learning.

Theme 3: Content-Language Balance Strategies

This theme reflects CLIL teachers' strategies for teaching both subject content and language, with a primary focus on content and language as a tool for understanding. Additionally, a student-centred teaching approach is emphasized.

b. The Current Situation of Students' Oral Learning in a Bilingual Fashion Design Course

This topic highlights key findings regarding students' current oral English learning status under the CLIL approach for teaching English oral skills. It reflects their CLIL learning environment and overall learning conditions, as in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and Categories with the Current Situation of Students' English Oral Learning

	Open Coding	Axial Coding (Categories)	Themes
1	Imitate the pronunciation of the teacher, lack of language environment.	Oral learning environment	The Current Situation of English Oral Learning
2	No difficulties, difficulties.	Difficulty of oral learning	
3	Improvise, discuss, prepare, use limited skills.	Ways to deal with classroom Q&A	
4	Vocabulary, Fluency, Coherence and Pronunciation, Organization of Content.	Dimensions of English oral skills improvement	

Theme: The Current Situation of English Oral Learning

This theme highlights the learning of English oral skills of fashion students in the CLIL environment. Students mainly learn by imitating the teacher's pronunciation, but a limited language environment hinders progress. Challenges vary, with some students managing well, while others struggle. In interactions, students use strategies like impromptu responses, discussions, preparation, and limited language skills to express ideas. They report improvements in vocabulary, fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and content organization.

In summary, in applying the CLIL approach to enhance students' English oral skills, the teacher fully integrated the 4Cs framework with the oral skills dimensions and emphasized this framework in designing teaching materials and activities to promote students' oral English. Meanwhile, students' feedback indicated that CLIL instruction effectively enhanced their speaking skills. However, both the CLIL teacher and students reported that grammar instruction was not the main focus of instruction. This suggests that content-language integration focuses more on subject content, while language instruction is applied in actual contexts to promote students' oral skills development.

4.2 Research Question 2: What challenges did stakeholders face in applying CLIL for English oral teaching within a bilingual fashion design course in China?

a. Challenges Faced by the CLIL Teacher in Teaching English Oral Skills

This topic analyzes the challenges CLIL teachers face in teaching English oral skills, categorized into two themes: challenges of oral skill teaching in CLIL classrooms and challenges of CLIL application for teachers, as in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes and Categories of the Challenges by the Teacher in Implementing the CLIL Oral Teaching

	Open Coding	Axial Coding (Categories)	Themes
1	Provide Sentence Pattern Examples with Fixed Collocations, Low Attention to Grammar, Emphasize Vocabulary Output, Focus on Logic.	Responses to the Challenges of Oral Teaching	Challenges of Oral Skill Teaching in CLIL Classroom
2	Ratio of Time Allocated to Oral Skill Teaching, Difficulty in Integrating Oral Skills with Content, Need to Prioritize Content Due to Limited Teaching Time, Unable to Spend Extensive Time on Grammar Teaching, Students' Accent Diversity, Students Need More Time to Learn.	Challenges in Oral Teaching	
3	Lack of Formal CLIL Training, Continuous Exploration.	Challenges in CLIL Teaching	Challenges of CLIL Application for Teacher
4	Challenges in Course Segment Design, Challenges in Combining Teaching Methods and Content, Challenging teacher's personal ability.	Challenges in Instructional Design	
5	Unwilling to Memorize Large Amounts of Vocabulary, Students Rejecting the Course, Significant Initial Challenges.	Challenges in Teaching Practice	
6	Resistance to Emotions, Unwilling to Memorize Large Amounts of Vocabulary.	Emotional Challenges for Students	

Theme 1: Challenges of Oral Skill Teaching in CLIL Classroom

This theme highlights the teacher's challenges in teaching oral skills in CLIL classrooms and her strategies to address them. The CLIL teacher provides sentence patterns with fixed collocations, prioritizes vocabulary output, and focuses on logical thinking and content organization while minimizing grammar instruction due to time constraints. Challenges include limited time for oral skills teaching, integrating content and language instruction, and diverse student accents and pronunciation issues. These findings underscore the complexities of balancing content and language teaching in CLIL classrooms and the need for strategies to improve oral skills.

Theme 2: Challenges of CLIL Application for Teacher

The theme highlights teachers' challenges in applying CLIL, including difficulties in teaching, design, and application, with the lack of formal CLIL training requiring ongoing adaptation. In instructional design, the teacher faces challenges in course segmentation,

integrating methods with content, and managing personal capacity to meet the CLIL pedagogy. In practice, the teacher faces resistance from students, including reluctance to memorize vocabulary, course rejection, and emotional resistance. These challenges highlight the need for structured support, targeted training, and strategies to address instructional and emotional barriers in CLIL application.

b. Student Challenges in CLIL Bilingual Classrooms for English Oral Skills

This topic analyzes the challenges students encounter in learning English oral skills during CLIL teaching, categorized into two themes: Challenge in Complete Use of English Language while Teaching and Weaknesses in Learning English Oral Skills, as in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes and Categories of the Challenges by Students in Implementing the CLIL Oral Teaching

	Open Coding	Axial coding (Categories)	Themes
1	Basic Understanding, Difficult to Understand.	Attitude Towards All-English Instruction	Challenge in Complete Use of English Language while Teaching
2	Weak in Grammar, Coherence and Pronunciation, Content Organization, Insufficient Vocabulary.	Weaknesses in English Language Proficiency	Weaknesses in Learning English Oral Skills
3	Narrow Knowledge Base, Difficult to Understand Professional Vocabulary.	Weaknesses in Knowledge Base	
4	Weak Expressive Ability, Ability to Adapt on the Spot.	Weaknesses in Communication Competence	

Theme 1: Challenge for Complete English Teaching

This topic highlights students' difficulties in an all-English teaching environment due to limited comprehension skills. Some students can only understand essential content and cannot participate in discussions on complex topics.

Theme 2: Weaknesses in Learning English Oral Skills

This theme explores students' challenges in English proficiency, knowledge, and communication within the CLIL classroom. Students struggle with grammar, coherence, pronunciation, content organization, and vocabulary, hindering communication. Their limited knowledge base and difficulty with professional vocabulary further impact comprehension. Additionally, weak expressive abilities and challenges in impromptu communication hinder active participation in discussions and presentations. These issues highlight the need for targeted support to improve language skills, broaden knowledge, and enhance communicative competence.

In summary of the themes embodied by the CLIL teacher and students, the study reveals challenges by the teacher in CLIL classrooms, including difficulties in balancing the teaching of oral skills with content delivery, time constraints, and an unmet need for grammar instruction. Meanwhile, students struggled with language proficiency, especially in grammar, coherence, and vocabulary, limiting their English foundation. These challenges emphasize the need for teacher training, tailored instructional design, and more time for language development to enhance teaching and learning in CLIL environments.

5.0 Discussion

In CLIL oral teaching, the teacher's strategies integrated oral skills and the 4Cs framework to develop language proficiency and subject knowledge. However, difficulties persist, including students' weak language foundation, limited technical vocabulary, restricted class time, and psychological barriers to adapting to the bilingual model. These difficulties align with the common dilemmas in bilingual education noted by Shykun (2023) and Liu (2018). However, this also highlights that some long-standing issues remain unresolved, particularly in areas such as students' English proficiency, allocation of teaching resources, and optimization of practical strategies. Addressing these challenges requires systematic reforms and innovations to better meet the practical demands of CLIL teaching.

In CLIL English oral teaching, challenges include oral expression, vocabulary use, and logical thinking, supporting the findings of Rong and Nair (2021). Effective strategies such as simplifying grammar, strengthening vocabulary, and providing sentence patterns are essential for overcoming these barriers. Students also face pressure in mastering both language and professional knowledge. Teachers should establish clear objectives, design structured stages, and provide continuous support to enhance student motivation and learning outcomes. Key challenges include students' weak English foundation, lack of formal CLIL training, limited resources, and insufficient practice, underscoring the importance of creating a contextually engaging learning environment, as highlighted by Cao (2023). Additionally, these challenges remain closely related to the English language environment, the bilingual teaching system, the quality of the faculty and their long-term development level in Chinese universities.

6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

The qualitative results indicated that the teacher designed and implemented effective teaching strategies to enhance students' oral English skills through CLIL's 4C framework, incorporating fashionable course content, instructional materials, and classroom activities. Moreover, gains insight into the challenges the teacher and students encounter when teaching and learning oral English to promote the effectiveness of subject matter content and language development mastery.

The following recommendations address CLIL oral language teaching challenges for teachers and students: Teachers should receive targeted CLIL training and ongoing professional development; institutions should invest in bilingual resources like textbooks and practical examples to improve students' understanding of specialized languages; interactive activities like group discussions and project-based learning should boost engagement; and enhance teaching interventions in CLIL application to gain more teaching experience.

From the perspective of bilingual fashion teaching situations in Chinese universities, the study highlights the need for structured curriculum policies to integrate bilingual fashion education resources and continuously develop course content. By addressing the gaps identified, institutions can foster an environment that supports the advancement of bilingual fashion education.

The limitations of this study lie in the sample selection, as purposive sampling may not fully represent all fashion-related programs in Chinese universities. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is somewhat limited.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The main contributions of the research are as follows: First, through in-depth analysis of students' learning experiences and classroom interactions, the potential of CLIL in promoting the integration of oral skills and integration of fashion design expertise, breaking through the limitations of traditional bilingual education models. Second, from a teaching perspective, the experiences and insights from implementing the CLIL approach are analyzed, highlighting challenges and solutions while offering valuable guidance for teachers to optimize course design, enhance teaching effectiveness, and address diverse educational needs. The research results provide necessary theoretical and practical support for bilingual education's diversified and innovative development.

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