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ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS THROUGH CLIL: COLLABORATION, PROBLEM-SOLVING, AND COMMUNICATION

Djumaniyazova Djerend Kakadjanovna

Senior Lecturer

Department of World Languages

Urgench RANCH University of Technology

Urgench, Uzbekistan

jjumaniyazova89@gmail.com

Abstract. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become an influential approach in higher education because it connects language learning with the development of professional abilities. By combining subject studies with foreign-language instruction, CLIL helps students strengthen cognitive, linguistic, and interpersonal skills at the same time. This article examines how CLIL supports soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential for today's workplaces. Through group projects, interactive tasks, and real-life problem-solving activities, students gain subject knowledge while also improving cooperation, negotiation, and reflective thinking. The article also discusses the role of CLIL in Uzbekistan, where university reforms are increasingly focused on English proficiency and professional competence. Higher education institutions that use CLIL in engineering, tourism, IT, and education programs give students chances to practice English in meaningful, job-related contexts, encouraging creativity, independence, and practical problem-solving. Although challenges such as inconsistent teacher preparation and limited materials still exist, research shows that CLIL promotes motivation, social interaction, and employability. The

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findings suggest that CLIL can effectively connect language learning with professional development and help prepare graduates for future careers.

Keywords: *CLIL, soft skills, problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, project-based learning*

Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is now considered one of the most effective methods in modern language education, especially in systems where professional readiness is important. As education becomes more competency-based, teachers must focus not only on language accuracy but also on soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. According to scholars, CLIL is a dual-purpose approach in which learners study language through meaningful subject content, helping them develop cognitive, interpersonal, and professional skills at the same time (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Meyer, 2010). This makes it particularly useful in universities that train students for international and competitive labor markets.

In Uzbekistan, CLIL has gained attention as a helpful method for improving English skills within ongoing higher education reforms. National initiatives aimed at raising English proficiency and professional competence support the use of interdisciplinary and communicative approaches. As universities implement CLIL in engineering, tourism, IT, and education programs, the role of soft-skill development becomes increasingly relevant.

Soft Skills in CLIL-Based Learning

One of CLIL's main strengths is its ability to create authentic communication situations. In CLIL classes, students must share ideas, clarify information, justify answers, and complete tasks together using the target language. This encourages more natural communication than traditional grammar-based lessons (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Learners also practice skills such

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as summarizing, paraphrasing, and giving structured explanations-all useful in professional environments.

Teamwork grows naturally in CLIL settings. Activities such as group projects, collaborative problem-solving, and peer instruction require students to organize tasks, take responsibility, and make decisions as a team (Coyle, 2015). These classroom interactions reflect real workplace behavior and help learners develop leadership, adaptability, and negotiation skills. Research shows that such interaction promotes higher motivation and more positive social relations (Banegas, 2020).

CLIL also strengthens critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Because students work with real content, they move beyond memorization toward analysis and evaluation. Activities like case-study discussions, mini-research projects, and environmental problem-solving tasks help students learn how to select information, compare options, justify decisions, and review results (Moore & Lorenzo, 2007). This is especially useful for Uzbekistan, where universities aim to increase creativity, independence, and practical skills. When students work on English-medium tasks related to engineering, transportation, tourism, agriculture, or entrepreneurship, they gain specialized vocabulary and the interpersonal skills needed in modern workplaces. As employers in Uzbekistan value teamwork, communication, and decision-making, expanding CLIL instruction can help improve the employability of graduates.

Applying CLIL for Soft-Skill Development in Uzbekistan

Introducing CLIL into professional education has strong potential to support the development of a skilled workforce in Uzbekistan. As the country expands international partnerships, academic mobility, and multilingual work environments, the importance of soft skills continues to grow. CLIL fits well with these needs because it naturally connects subject learning with

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communication-based activities.

To strengthen soft-skill outcomes, Uzbek universities may adopt several strategies supported by international practice. First, teachers can include more project-based CLIL modules that imitate real workplace tasks. These modules help students improve English while also building planning, teamwork, and presentation skills (Banegas, 2020). Second, assessment systems can focus not only on language accuracy but also on the quality of collaboration and problem-solving. Third, closer cooperation between subject specialists and language teachers can ensure that CLIL lessons reflect realistic professional communication.

Although challenges remain such as uneven teacher training, limited resources, and different levels of English proficiency-the country's active modernization efforts create positive conditions for expanding CLIL. As universities gain more experience and educators receive targeted training, CLIL can become a key approach for developing confident, communicative, and professionally ready graduates.

Conclusion

CLIL proves to be an effective approach for developing both language skills and essential soft skills in higher education. By learning subject content through a foreign language, students practice communication, teamwork, and problem-solving in meaningful situations that reflect real professional tasks. In Uzbekistan, CLIL supports national goals to improve English proficiency and strengthen graduates' workplace readiness. Although challenges such as limited resources and varied teacher preparation remain, universities are gradually building stronger conditions for CLIL. Overall, CLIL has strong potential to help institutions prepare students who are more confident, communicative, and adaptable to modern career demands.

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