

## **Exploring the impact of CLIL on language acquisition in elementary-level english learners: A systematic literature review**

*Explorando el impacto del aicle (aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras) en la adquisición del lenguaje en estudiantes de inglés de primaria: una revisión sistemática de la literatura*

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### **Abstract**

This article presents the findings of a literature review on the impact of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) on English acquisition in young learners, focusing on strengthening writing skills and identifying the main difficulties and challenges that educators face with this method. For the analysis, a literature review approach was used to enable the interpretation of various studies, providing a foundation for further research on CLIL. Furthermore, this research aims were to analyze how CLIL fosters critical thinking and active participation, allowing young learners to meaningfully engage with both language and subject matter. Based on the literary analysis, several authors concur that implementing CLIL in the classroom is crucial for the development of writing skills. This method enables students to create new communication formats and confront situations where they must generate codes to comprehend the studied content.

Keywords: Writing skill; CLIL; students.

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## Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una revisión bibliográfica sobre el impacto de AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras) en la adquisición de inglés en jóvenes estudiantes, centrándose en el fortalecimiento de las habilidades de escritura e identificando las principales dificultades y retos a los que se enfrentan los educadores con este método. Para el análisis, se utilizó un enfoque de revisión de la literatura que permitió la interpretación de varios estudios, proporcionando una base para futuras investigaciones sobre AICLE. Además, los objetivos de esta investigación fueron analizar cómo AICLE fomenta el pensamiento crítico y la participación activa, permitiendo a los jóvenes estudiantes involucrarse de manera significativa tanto con el lenguaje como con la materia. A partir del análisis literario, varios autores coinciden en que la implementación de AICLE en el aula es crucial para el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura. Este método permite a los estudiantes crear nuevos formatos de comunicación y enfrentarse a situaciones en las que deben generar códigos para comprender los contenidos estudiados.

Palabras clave: Habilidades de la escritura; AICLE; estudiantes.

## Introduction

CLIL is an approach that integrates language learning with subject matter instruction, enabling students to achieve both content knowledge and language proficiency simultaneously. According to Campillo et al. (2019), CLIL has emerged as a prominent methodology in multilingual education, particularly in Europe, where policies promote the learning of multiple languages. CLIL is not merely language instruction supplemented with additional content but rather an integrated approach that balances subject learning with language acquisition (Coyle et al., 2010, as cited in Campillo et al., 2019). Sheir and Yacoub (2024), note that CLIL is effective in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where evidence shows that students more effectively acquire language skills relevant to their academic or professional fields. Moreover, Salazar (2015), mentions that CLIL contributes to student development, especially in writing, because students are immersed in the target language environment. Compared to traditional EFL instruction, CLIL as a methodology is also implemented in primary education, as shown by Salazar (2015), who examined its impact on vocabulary and writing skills among young learners. However, implementation can be difficult in countries that do not have enough training for teachers capable of integrating content and language. Overall, CLIL represents an approach to language education that aims to enhance both linguistic and cognitive skills in diverse learning environments (Cortés, 2021).

The incorporation of CLIL needs a highly structured approach that allows for both subject content and language learning. According to Campillo et al. (2019), the successful implementation of CLIL requires careful lesson planning that integrates subject-specific knowledge with language objectives, allowing students to develop both academic and linguistic competencies. A key aspect of CLIL emphasizes the importance of selecting authentic and meaningful materials suited to students' needs—such as visual aids and academic texts—to support students in developing writing fluency (Sheir & Yacoub, 2024). In addition, implementing CLIL in primary education subjects such as Environmental Studies and History can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition and writing skills through interactive and immersive activities. Furthermore, Cortés (2021), highlights the significance of teacher training and self-evaluation, advocating for the use of observation chec-

klists to refine instructional strategies. Moreover, the careful selection of educational materials is paramount, as it plays a crucial role in significantly improving students' proficiency in the target language (Xanthou, 2017).

The 4Cs Framework is an essential model for CLIL, emphasizing the integration of Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture in the learning process. According to Campillo et al. (2019), CLIL promotes subject learning (related to Content) while simultaneously developing students' language skills (Communication) in a foreign language. They highlight that CLIL is not simply content teaching in another language but rather a structured approach that ensures both linguistic and cognitive development. The four main components of the framework are:

**Content:** It's all about the subject matter, topics, and topics that students will learn. Within this field, teachers should consider the topics in terms of required knowledge, skills, and designing a learning environment that facilitates language acquisition along with subject mastery.

**Communication:** In this component, students become more engaged with learning as they actively use the target language for meaningful interaction and understanding, rather than merely studying linguistic forms in isolation.

**Cognition:** This aspect focuses on developing students' thinking skills. Students continuously develop higher order thinking skills (e.g., analysis, evaluation, creation) by engaging with cognitively demanding tasks and structured approaches, like Bloom's Taxonomy. Additionally, students acquire competencies applicable to real-life situations.

**Culture:** This component addresses the development of intercultural understanding and awareness. Students can learn about their own culture and other cultures through relevant content, interactions, readings, and videos. Teachers should include diverse contexts and perspectives to guide students toward a broader understanding of multiculturalism and global citizenship.

Moreover, CLIL has been demonstrated to enhance writing skills by providing students with increased exposure to the target language within meaningful contexts. Research indicates that CLIL learners show significant improvements in vocabulary and language use compared to non-CLIL students (Ruiz, 2019). Schools across Europe report that when teachers employ this method, students initiate their writing processes more efficiently. Their texts tend to be more cohesive and well-structured, incorporating more complex sentence constructions and effective lexical choices. This approach enables students to benefit from writing tasks that require both language and subject-matter knowledge, thereby strengthening their overall written competence (Ruiz, 2019).

Furthermore, CLIL is an educational methodology used for learning content and language integration. Effective writing skills are emphasized within the CLIL framework, as they play a crucial role in supporting students' ability to express complex ideas and concepts in both their native and additional languages. Writing activities in CLIL classrooms often involve composing essays, reports, and reflective pieces that require learners to synthesize their understanding of subject matter content alongside appropriate language structures.

CLIL is significant for elementary schools as it provides young learners with early exposure to a foreign language while simultaneously developing subject-specific knowledge (Miralles, 2019). CLIL in primary schools supports students in enhancing their vocabulary and writing skills, making language learning more natural and engaging. Additionally, the immersive nature of CLIL allows children to develop cognitive and communication skills in meaningful contexts, as highlighted by the 4Cs framework (Campillo et al., 2019).

Effective CLIL implementation in elementary schools requires well-trained teachers who can integrate language and content effectively. Utilizing self-evaluation tools can help improve teaching strategies and ensure lesson effectiveness. According to Cortés (2021), CLIL is an important approach in primary education, as it provides a foundation for bilingualism, cognitive development, and academic success. Applying the CLIL method, especially in elementary education, allows children to learn new concepts through innovative, teacher-introduced classroom strategies. The focus of CLIL is on selecting effective, attention-capturing activities.

Implementing this method in primary schools can be challenging, particularly with very young learners (e.g., ages 3-5), demanding specific pedagogical adaptations (Daiz, 2021). Nevertheless, CLIL is a significant method as it enables students from a young age to engage in activities that aid vocabulary retention; students often need to utilize strategies such as gestures and visual cues to construct meaning (Campillo et al., 2019). According to Costa (2009), studies on CLIL have shown positive learning outcomes in elementary schools. However, there is still a comparative lack of research at the tertiary level, which can be problematic as inconsistent approaches may arise without established best practices (Costa, 2009).

Additionally, CLIL implementation in European countries has demonstrated significant progress, with some European schools being adopted as models by schools in Latin America. In Ecuador, CLIL has been incorporated through government legislation, initially targeting native Kichwa speakers learning Spanish. Reports indicate that CLIL principles were adapted more broadly in Ecuador around 2016 with the goal of enhancing English language proficiency. However, the autonomy some schools possess in implementing CLIL can result in inconsistencies. Public institutions, in particular, may struggle to adhere strictly to the CLIL structure due to insufficient materials and inadequate teacher training (Mourad, 2024).

The integration of CLIL into curricula, especially in Latin America, including countries such as Argentina, Colombia, and Ecuador, follow the international trends in bilingual and multilingual education aimed at improving students' English proficiency. The success of these initiatives often depends on structured teacher training programmed and the availability of well-designed teaching materials. Campillo et al. (2019), point out that CLIL has been adopted by various education systems, supporting bilingual education policies and contributing to improving both linguistic competence and content knowledge. These principles provide a flexible and adaptable framework to different educational contexts.

## Methodology

This literature review explored the impact of CLIL on language acquisition among elementary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It specifically examined CLIL's effectiveness for developing writing skills by analyzing reported methodologies, successes, and challenges documented in recent empirical studies.

A semi-systematic literature review methodology was employed, searching for articles published between 2015 and 2024. The search was conducted across the Scopus, ERIC, Redalyc, SciELO, and Google Scholar databases. Search terms included combinations of the following phrases, using Boolean operators: ("Content and Language Integrated Learning" OR CLIL) AND ("English as a Foreign Language" OR EFL) AND ("language skills" OR "language proficiency" OR writing).

The initial search yielded 20 articles. Following screening, 15 articles were selected for inclusion based on specific criteria. Inclusion criteria stipulated that articles must: (a) be empirical studies published in English to avoid potential translation bias; (b) focus on CLIL implementation in elementary school settings; (c) specifically address the impact on EFL learners' language acquisition, particularly writing; and (d) be published between 2015 and 2024. Studies focusing solely on higher education contexts, distance learning, or CLIL applications unrelated to elementary EFL writing development were excluded.

The 2015–2024 timeframe was deliberately chosen to capture recent developments in CLIL practices, including contemporary instructional materials, teacher training approaches, and research findings. Furthermore, this period was selected to address a noted scarcity of documented CLIL research specifically within the Ecuadorian elementary education context, despite national efforts to promote bilingualism. Restricting the publication years to this range aimed to provide insights relevant to this specific gap in the literature.

## Geographical Location of the Studies

Regarding geographic distribution, the analysis indicated that most of the reviewed studies on CLIL practices were conducted in Latin American countries, European nations, and other Western. According to Campillo et al. (2019), while CLIL research is present in these regions, a specific focus on using the method primarily to develop writing skills appears to be less common, particularly within the Latin American context. This geographic diversity highlights the varied settings and cultural dynamics influencing CLIL implementation, offering a broad perspective on the method's application and reported outcomes across different contexts.

Table 1. Articles by geographic location

Country	Number of Studies
Argentina	3
Indonesia	1

Spain	4
Brazil	1
Grecia	1
Colombia	1
Ecuador	2
Austria	1
<b>Total</b>	15

Source: own elaboration.

### Pedagogical Methods and Practices in Reviewed Articles

The examined research focused on CLIL as a method in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Most studies utilized action research, the 4Cs framework, and group work collaboration. Most of the research centered on the use of CLIL to increase student proficiency levels.

Table 2. Pedagogical methods and practices

Method and Practice	Author/Year
CLIL methodology focus on writing skills	5
4Cs Framework	2
Role-play / dialogues	3
Cooperative learning	1
Theme-based Activities	1

Source: own elaboration.

Research suggests that CLIL is a method that helps students develop skills through various activities integrating both language and content learning. Additionally, it was highlighted that the incorporation of the 4Cs framework also helps learners in developing writing skills.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This section analyzes the 15 empirical articles selected for review, which originated from various global contexts, including Spain, Colombia, Ecuador, Austria, Greece, and Taiwan. These articles were systematically categorized for this review based on the previously outlined inclusion and exclusion criteria (published 2015-2024, English language, elementary EFL context, CLIL focus).

Table 3 presents an analysis of studies investigating the challenges and successes associated with using CLIL, specifically concerning the development of writing skills at the elementary level. Notably, research included from Spain and Brazil, while potentially examining different specific methodologies or nuances within the elementary setting, shared the common objective of enhancing writing proficiency through CLIL. Ongoing research efforts in these and other included

countries provide valuable insights into the relationship between CLIL implementation and the development of writing skills among young EFL learners.

Table 3. Data Analysis.  
Review: Challenges and Successes associated with implementing CLIL

Author, year & country	Objective	Methods	Results	Challenges
Soto et al. (2017). Spain	To analyze successes associated with implementing CLIL.	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews	Students can explore cultures to enhance their understanding.	Teachers do not receive sufficient training on how to integrate subjects effectively.
Carrasco et al. (2019). Spain	To analyze successes associated with implementing CLIL	Quantitative and qualitative with pre-service teachers who teach in elementary schools.	CLIL supports students to engage more effectively with challenging academic content in their subjects.	Schools do not follow the curriculum to integrate the subjects.
Leino et al. (2022). Brazil	To explore how successfully students learned content	Quantitative study using field notes transcripts and interviews.	Students are motivated and acquire specific vocabulary, which benefits in the retention of the vocabulary they are learning.	Students faced challenges in self confidence in foreign languages.
Avila (2022). Colombia	To examine the implementation of CLIL in writing skills	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews.	CLIL develop a more general understanding of the topics they are writing.	Lack of school services can affect the learning experience.
Reinoso (2019). Ecuador	Examine the effectiveness of CLIL in developing writing skills in English	Quantitative and qualitative with pre-service teachers who teach in elementary schools.	CLIL provides vocabulary that makes students more interested in their writing.	There is a lack of teachers analyzing the texts to provide for the students.
Guerriet (2020). Colombia	To identify different ways of teaching CLIL	Qualitative research using information from many books and studies, like: - CLIL teaching books from Coyle, Hood.	Students learn about other countries, traditions, and ways of thinking, making them more open-minded.	Every school does it in a different way and teachers have to figure out what works well for them.

Source: own elaboration.

The analyzed articles on CLIL implementation encompass various perspectives including challenges, successes, and skill improvements. A common finding among these articles is that integrating CLIL into the classroom can enable students to solve problems within real contexts (Ávila, 2017). Moreover, CLIL supports students in engaging more effectively with challenging academic content in their subjects. According to Carrasco (2019) and Leino (2019), integrating



academic English with specialized content facilitates vocabulary retention and enhances students' writing skills. However, there are significant issues when institutions attempt to incorporate this method. As Reinoso (2022), notes, inadequate school services can adversely affect students' learning experiences. Additionally, a shortage of teachers trained in CLIL can result in insufficient analysis and motivation for students engaging with CLIL materials.

Table 4 presents an analysis study that investigate the correlation between CLIL implementation and the development of writing skills in elementary school. studies, conducted in Spain and Brazil, focus on different educational levels and methodologies but share the common objective of improving writing skills through CLIL. Additionally, both countries have been exploring new information about the impact of CLIL in the classroom. These research efforts provide a more accurate understanding of the relationship between CLIL and writing skill development.

Table 4. Data Analysis.  
Previous studies about CLIL implementation and the development of writing skills.

Author, year & country	Objective	Methods	Results	Writing skills
Perez et al. (2018). Spain	To analyze the long-term impact of CLIL on students' competence across writing.	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews	Students outperform show less improvement.	Students require sustained exposure over time to achieve a significant impact.
Farah et al. (2019). Indonesia	To investigate teachers' perceptions of CLIL on writing skills.	Quantitative and qualitative with pre-service teachers who teach in elementary schools.	CLIL allows students to investigate and transcribe information, helping them write competently in all classes.	Enhanced confidence and diminished anxiety in written assignments.
Gupta et al. (2022). Brazil	To explore the process of CLIL in writing skills.	Quantitative study using field notes transcripts and interviews.	Creative writing allows students to be more engaging and express their ideas.	Students faced challenges in self confidence in foreign language.
Nieto (2022). Spain	To assess the effectiveness of CLIL in acquiring English competence	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews.	CLIL helps students understand topics more broadly.	Enhanced analytical reasoning, synthesis, and application to construct writing assignments.
Reinoso (2019). Ecuador	Examine the effectiveness of CLIL in developing writing skills in English	Quantitative and qualitative with pre-service teachers who teach in elementary schools.	CLIL offers vocabulary that engages students in their writing.	Significant enhancements in problem-solving and communication abilities.
Dalton (2022). Austria	To identify breakthroughs in writing competence influenced by CLIL	Qualitative research using information from many books and studies, like: - CLIL teaching books from Coyle, Hood.	Students develop writing activities for various subjects within CLIL.	Improved overall skills, reduced concerns about writing tasks, and increased motivation.

Source: own elaboration.



The analyzed articles on CLIL consistently highlight the positive impact of CLIL implementation on the development of writing skills in elementary school students. Perez (2018), found that integrating CLIL into the classroom increases exposure to the target language. Gupta (2022), suggests that CLIL helps students engage more effectively with writing skills by allowing them to focus less on grammar and more on expressing their ideas, thereby building confidence. Reinoso (2019), notes that CLIL introduces new vocabulary, making writing more interesting for students. Dalton (2022), indicates that integrating CLIL with other subjects enables students to develop their writing skills organically within a contextual framework, often without realizing they are improving.

Table 5. Data Analysis.  
Previous studies characterize the successes associated with implementing CLIL.

Author, Year & Country	Objective	Methods	Results	Successes
Pavon et al. (2016). Argentina	To analyze the literature and roles for implementation	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews	Clil requires more communicative and interactive methods	Real world projects student centered activities.
Teran et al. (2024). Grecia	To analyze successes literature associated with implementing CLIL	Quantitative and qualitative with preservice teachers who teach in elementary schools.	CLIL supports students' significant correlation between CLIL.	Interactive speaking and writing task confidence building activities.
Castillo et al. (2022). Argentina	To explore how successfully literature and propose recommendation of CLIL for elementary education	Quantitative study using field notes, transcripts and interviews.	Students are motivated and acquire specific vocabulary, which benefits in the retention of the vocabulary they are learning.	Technology integration to build cultural knowledge.
Pila et al. (2023). Colombia	To assess the impact of CLIL on motivation and English learning.	Action research using, field notes, survey and interviews.	CLIL increase writing skills and motivation toward English.	Enhance retention of vocabulary and communication skills.

Source: own elaboration.

The analyzed articles on CLIL from previous studies highlight both the challenges and successes associated with its implementation. According to Pavon (2016), this strategy lacks a standardized curriculum, leading to various implementations worldwide. Castillo (2022), identifies one of the significant issues as overlooking students' backgrounds, which can adversely affect

development. Pila (2023), notes that students' lack of motivation is often linked to their economic status, given that this strategy relies heavily on technological resources. Additionally, Castillo (2022), points out that students suffer from insufficient support from teachers and staff due to a lack of information and implementation protocols, creating a feeling of isolation during the process.

## Development

The evidence collected from this study is that implementing CLIL fosters student autonomy, as the teacher acts primarily as a facilitator in the learning process. By engaging with subject content in a foreign language, students develop responsibility for their learning. Moreover, CLIL motivated students to face challenges that allow them to improve communications skills and as a result students showed more independent learners capable of applying their knowledge in real situations in different contexts. According to Nieto (2022), writing skills are enhanced by CLIL in two ways. Firstly, it involves learning through interactive activities that capture the learners' attention. Secondly, when students need to complete writing tasks, they are supported by sufficient vocabulary because they are immersed in an environment of the target language.

The analyzed articles on CLIL implementation encompass various perspectives including challenges, successes, and skill improvements. A common finding among these articles is that integrating CLIL into the classroom can enable students to solve problems within real contexts (Ávila, 2017). According to Carrasco (2019) and Leino (2019), integrating academic English with specialized content facilitates vocabulary.

Moreover, the integration of CLIL significantly enhances writing skills by exposing learners to the target language in meaningful contexts (Ruiz, 2019). It encourages active engagement in writing processes, resulting in cohesive and well-structured texts with complex sentences (Miralles, 2019). By focusing on subject-specific content, students apply both language and academic knowledge, strengthening their writing competence (Cortés, 2021). Careful selection of educational materials is crucial for effective language acquisition (Campillo et al., 2019; Xanthou, 2017). Despite challenges like the need for well-trained educators and potential gaps in language proficiency without ongoing exposure (Leino et al., 2022; Pérez et al., 2018; Farah et al., 2019), CLIL's immersive nature supports cognitive and communication skill development in young learners (Campillo et al., 2019). However, motivation levels can change, affecting learner engagement (Soto et al., 2017). Overall, while CLIL benefits writing skills, attention to implementation complexities is essential for maximizing its potential in education.

It cannot be assumed that implementing CLIL throughout the entire classroom will necessarily motivate students to enhance their writing skills. The variability in how CLIL is applied across different educational settings complicates the establishment of standardized best practices. Addi-

tionally, assessing both content and language learning outcomes is a significant challenge (Soto, 2019). This analysis also found that professional development is important for this method, as the strategies used by the teacher affect the learning process of the students.

In this context, CLIL approach encourages student engagement by introducing them to a new culture, which can enhance their motivation (Carrasco, 2019). Additionally, one study about writing skills shows that the implementation of CLIL has shown to create an effective learning environment where students experience positive impacts on their writing skills as they work to understand the meanings of words Guerriet (2020). The articles demonstrate that CLIL enhances students' knowledge by facilitating learning within specific contexts. According to Leino (2019), CLIL as a methodology has faced many concerns because a significant challenge in continuing with this method is the language difficulties experienced by students, especially in public schools.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the substantial impact of CLIL on the writing skills of young learners of English as a foreign language. CLIL creates a stimulating and interactive educational environment, allowing students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts across multiple disciplines. Data shows that students who participate in CLIL programs exhibit significant improvements in writing performance compared to their non-CLIL counterparts, particularly in areas such as accuracy, vocabulary, and text coherence. CLIL participants show marked progress in their writing skills, confirming the initial research question about the influence of various learning environments on writing proficiency. These articles make the case for educators and teacher trainers to prioritize the adoption of CLIL strategies within their classrooms, as they improve writing skills and facilitate comprehensive language development. In this sense, policymakers should consider incorporating CLIL frameworks into curriculum design to effectively support both language acquisition.

Overall, CLIL provides an adaptable method that enhances students' language acquisition by integrating subjects, which facilitates interactive classroom experiences. Further research on the effects of CLIL in graduate education, particularly regarding career prospects and scholarly output, could provide valuable data for institutions considering internationalization strategies. This would aid in comprehending the broader impact of CLIL on students' professional development.

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