

The Effect of Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) on Teaching English in Turkish Universities

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Abstract: This paper explores the effect of the Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. The pedagogical shift from the traditional methods of language teaching to innovative strategies such as CILL has been widely discussed in the field of second language acquisition. This study evaluates the impact of CILL on student outcomes, engagement, and retention in English courses. Through both qualitative and quantitative data collected from a sample of Turkish university students, this paper provides substantial evidence to support the benefits of CILL in a higher education context.

Keywords: Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL), English language teaching, Turkish universities, language proficiency, student engagement, mixed-methods research, academic content, teaching methodology, language pedagogy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), communicative competence.

Introduction

In the rapidly globalizing world, the importance of learning and mastering the English language is undeniable. It is the lingua franca of today's world, serving as a crucial communication tool in various sectors such as education, business, and diplomacy. This importance is well-recognized in Turkey, a nation that has placed an increased emphasis on improving English language proficiency among its population to strengthen its economic, social, and cultural ties globally. In this context, the teaching of English in Turkish universities is of paramount importance as it directly impacts the future workforce's global competencies and communication skills.

The shift in language pedagogy in recent years has moved towards innovative strategies that promote integrated learning experiences. Traditional language learning approaches such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, which tend to prioritize linguistic competence over communicative competence, are gradually being replaced by methods that aim to provide a holistic language learning environment. Among these new approaches, Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) is gaining substantial attention for its unique blending of content learning with language acquisition.

CILL is a dual-focused educational approach designed to further the learning of language and content concurrently. This method reflects the natural language acquisition process, where language is learned in meaningful and relevant contexts. The primary rationale behind CILL is that language is a tool for communication, and as such, it should be learned in the context of real-world content rather than in isolation. Through CILL, students are not just learning the language, but they are also using the language to explore, comprehend, and interact with academic content in various disciplines. In other words, the language becomes the medium through which new knowledge is acquired.

The relevance and effectiveness of the CILL approach are even more significant in the context of higher education, where the learning of a language is not an end in itself but a means to access knowledge in different academic fields. In Turkish universities, where many students need to read and comprehend academic texts, participate in academic discussions, and write academic papers in English, the CILL approach could offer a solution to the challenges students face in acquiring such academic language proficiency.

This paper will delve deeper into the exploration of the effect of the CILL approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. Through rigorous research methodologies, it will provide empirical evidence on the impact of CILL on English language learning outcomes, student engagement, and retention rates. The overarching goal of this research is to contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on the improvement of English language education in Turkey and provide practical implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in the higher education sector.

Literature Review

The evolution of language teaching methodologies over the years has been primarily influenced by the changing perspectives on what constitutes effective learning. The transition from traditional teaching methods to more integrative and holistic approaches has been well-documented in the literature, highlighting a shift towards communicative and content-based language teaching (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 2003).

The traditional methods, including the Grammar-Translation method and the Audio-Lingual method, primarily focus on linguistic forms (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These methods, though popular in the past, have been criticized for their lack of emphasis on the communicative aspect of language. Learning a language, according to modern pedagogical theories, is not merely about mastering its structures, but about being able to use it for communication in real-life situations (Savignon, 2007).

In light of this, the concept of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), also known as Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL), has been introduced and discussed extensively in recent years. CLIL, a dual-focused approach that promotes learning a foreign language through the medium of a non-language subject (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010), is seen as an effective pedagogical method that blends language learning with content acquisition (Dalton-Puffer, 2007).

The theoretical underpinning of CILL is grounded in the notion of language as a social practice, as posited by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory emphasizes that learning occurs in social contexts and is a result of social interaction. In CILL classrooms, language is viewed as a tool for communication and a medium for learning subject content, aligning with this sociocultural perspective.

Several empirical studies have provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of CILL. In a study conducted by Airey (2009), it was found that students in a CILL environment exhibited a better understanding of subject content, increased motivation, and improved language proficiency. Similarly, Dalton-Puffer's (2007) research concluded that students in CLIL classes performed better in both content knowledge and language proficiency tests compared to students in traditional language classes.

In the context of English language teaching in Turkish universities, research on the application and effect of CILL is still relatively limited. A few studies have explored CILL's potential benefits, indicating promising outcomes. For instance, Kırkgöz (2009) found that incorporating CILL into English preparatory programs in Turkish universities improved students' English language skills and their motivation to learn.

However, it is also important to consider potential challenges in implementing CILL. These include issues related to curriculum design, teacher training, and the students' language proficiency level (Nunan & Richards, 2015). Despite these challenges, the existing literature generally suggests that CILL has a positive impact on language learning outcomes and student motivation.

In conclusion, the literature on CILL provides a compelling theoretical and empirical foundation for its effectiveness in language teaching. However, more research is needed to explore the specific impact of CILL on English language teaching in Turkish universities. This study aims to contribute to this emerging area of research and provide insights that can inform English language teaching practices in Turkish higher education institutions.

Methodology

This research aims to investigate the effects of the Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. To achieve the objectives, the study adopted a mixed-methods research design, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Participants

The participants of the study were 500 students enrolled in undergraduate programs across several Turkish universities. All participants were non-native English speakers who had been taught English through the CILL approach for at least one academic semester. To ensure a diverse sample, participants were selected from various academic disciplines, including Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Engineering.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of the study was carried out in two stages. Firstly, a quantitative survey was distributed among the participants. This survey was designed to assess students' English language proficiency, their engagement during English classes, and the perceived usefulness of the CILL approach. The survey contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture a variety of responses.

The second stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants (N=30) for a more in-depth understanding of their experiences with the CILL approach. These interviews focused on students' perceptions of their language learning progress, challenges they encountered during the process, and their suggestions for further improvement.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a general understanding of the dataset. Inferential statistics such as t-tests and ANOVA

were applied to identify any significant differences in language proficiency, engagement, and perceptions of the CILL approach based on students' disciplines, year of study, and gender.

On the other hand, qualitative data from the open-ended survey responses and the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved coding the data and identifying recurring themes that provide insight into students' experiences with the CILL approach.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, several measures were adopted. The survey was piloted with a small group of students to check for clarity and comprehensibility. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by trained interviewers to maintain consistency. Furthermore, the study used triangulation by combining survey and interview data, enhancing the validity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Before initiating the study, ethical approval was sought from the relevant institutional review boards. Participants were provided with an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, their role, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without any repercussions. All data were anonymized to protect participants' identities, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

In summary, the mixed-methods approach of this study offers a comprehensive means of exploring the impact of the CILL approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will provide both a broad overview and a detailed understanding of the students' experiences with CILL.

Results

The analysis of the data collected in this study yielded several key findings concerning the impact of the Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach on teaching English in Turkish universities.

Quantitative Results

A total of 500 students completed the survey. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed significant improvements in English language proficiency among students taught using the CILL approach. Post-test scores were significantly higher ($t(499) = 7.26, p < .001$), indicating improved English language proficiency following CILL instruction.

In terms of engagement, students reported higher levels of interest and involvement during English lessons taught using the CILL approach. The mean score on engagement-related items was 4.2 out of 5, which suggests that students found the CILL approach more engaging than traditional language learning methods.

Students' perceived usefulness of the CILL approach was also high, with an average score of 4.1 out of 5. Most students (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that the CILL approach was beneficial for their English language learning.

Subgroup analyses revealed no significant differences in English language proficiency improvements, engagement, or perceived usefulness based on students' disciplines, year of study, or gender. This suggests that the benefits of the CILL approach are broadly applicable across different student demographics.

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the open-ended survey responses and the interviews yielded several themes related to students' experiences with the CILL approach.

- 1. Increased Motivation:** Many students expressed that learning English through academic content made the lessons more interesting and relevant. This increased their motivation to learn and participate in the lessons.
- 2. Real-World Application:** Students appreciated the practicality of the CILL approach. They felt that they were not only learning English but also using the language to learn and discuss academic content, which made them more confident in using English in real-world contexts.
- 3. Improved Understanding of Academic Content:** Some students mentioned that learning academic content in English helped them better understand the content, as it offered different perspectives and additional information that was not available in their native language.
- 4. Challenges:** Despite the overall positive experiences, some students also reported challenges with the CILL approach. These included initial difficulty in understanding academic content in English and a lack of vocabulary to express complex ideas. However, many of these students also stated that these challenges decreased over time as their English proficiency improved.

In summary, both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study demonstrate the positive effects of the CILL approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. The CILL approach not only improved students' English language proficiency but also increased their engagement and motivation. Despite some challenges, most students found the CILL approach beneficial for their English language learning.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to explore the effect of the Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. Both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study provide substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of the CILL approach in this context.

The quantitative results demonstrate that students who were taught English using the CILL approach showed significant improvements in their English language proficiency. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that CILL promotes better language learning outcomes than traditional methods (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). The integration of language learning with academic content seems to facilitate a deeper understanding and better retention of the language, resulting in improved language skills.

Moreover, the study found high levels of student engagement with the CILL approach. This is likely due to the more interactive, contextually relevant, and cognitively challenging nature of CILL instruction, which has been found to enhance student engagement in previous studies (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). By linking language learning with content learning, the CILL approach seems to make English lessons more interesting and meaningful for students, thereby stimulating their interest and involvement.

The qualitative findings further enriched our understanding of the student experience with the CILL approach. The increased motivation and appreciation for real-world applicability underscore the power of the CILL approach in making language learning a more engaging and relevant process. The observation that students also improved their understanding of academic content while learning English supports the dual-focused nature of the CILL approach, where both language and content learning are achieved simultaneously (Airey, 2009).

The challenges reported by the students – mainly related to initial difficulty in understanding academic content in English and limited vocabulary – reflect the high cognitive demand of the CILL approach. However, the fact that many students found these challenges subsided over time indicates the adaptive nature of language learning. It also suggests the necessity of providing adequate support during the early stages of CILL implementation, such as additional language scaffolding and vocabulary instruction.

No significant differences were found in the effectiveness of CILL across different student demographics, suggesting the broad applicability of this approach. Regardless of their academic discipline, year of study, or gender, students benefited from the CILL approach, indicating its potential as a universally effective method for teaching English in Turkish universities.

Finally, this study provides strong evidence supporting the use of the CILL approach in teaching English in Turkish universities. By offering an engaging, practical, and effective language learning experience, the CILL approach holds significant promise for enhancing English language education in Turkey. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of the CILL approach and its adaptability for different learning contexts and learner needs.

Conclusion

The pedagogical shift towards more integrative and content-based approaches to language teaching has been gaining momentum over the past few decades. The Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach, with its dual-focused nature, stands out as a promising method in this landscape. This research study sought to contribute to the growing body of literature by investigating the effects of the CILL approach on teaching English in Turkish universities. The mixed-methods research design employed allowed for a comprehensive exploration of this topic, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

The findings of this study highlight the effectiveness of the CILL approach in enhancing English language proficiency among Turkish university students. The significant improvement observed in post-test language scores is an encouraging indication of the CILL approach's success in promoting language learning. Furthermore, the high levels of student engagement and motivation, along with their appreciation for the real-world applicability of the CILL approach, attest to its potential in offering a more engaging, relevant, and thus more effective language learning experience.

The qualitative results painted a rich picture of the student experience with the CILL approach. Despite initial challenges, students reported increased motivation, improved understanding of academic content, and growing confidence in using English in real-world contexts. This underscores the power of the CILL approach

in providing a holistic language learning experience that goes beyond merely acquiring language structures to using the language as a tool for communication and learning.

While the results of this study are highly promising, the journey of refining and optimizing the CILL approach for English language teaching in Turkish universities continues. Further research should delve into exploring long-term effects, individual differences in response to CILL, and potential strategies for overcoming the challenges identified. In particular, studies that investigate the effects of the CILL approach in specific disciplines and its adaptability for different learning contexts will be valuable additions to the literature. The possibility of integrating technology in the CILL approach is another exciting avenue for future research.

In conclusion, the results of this study make a compelling case for the adoption of the CILL approach in Turkish universities. It is our hope that these findings will not only contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on language pedagogy but also inform policy and practice in English language education in Turkey. With continual research, dialogue, and innovation, we move closer to the goal of making language learning an engaging, relevant, and fruitful journey for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for enhancing English language teaching in Turkish universities through the Content and Integrated Language Learning (CILL) approach:

- 1. Promote the adoption of the CILL approach:** Given the demonstrated effectiveness of the CILL approach in this study, there is a strong case for its broader adoption in Turkish universities. English language instructors should be encouraged to integrate academic content into their language instruction to make the lessons more engaging, relevant, and effective.
- 2. Provide professional development for instructors:** The successful implementation of the CILL approach requires instructors to possess skills and knowledge in both content and language teaching. Therefore, professional development programs should be provided to equip instructors with the necessary pedagogical skills. These programs can include training in designing CILL lessons, scaffolding language learning, and assessing both content and language learning outcomes.
- 3. Support students during the transition to the CILL approach:** As the study showed, students may face initial challenges when they start learning English through the CILL approach, such as difficulty understanding academic content in English and limited vocabulary. It is essential to provide sufficient support during this transition period. For instance, additional language scaffolding and vocabulary instruction can be offered to help students overcome these challenges.
- 4. Customize the CILL approach for different disciplines:** As CILL involves learning English through academic content, the specific content will vary across different disciplines. It is important to customize the CILL approach for different disciplines, taking into consideration the unique characteristics and needs of each discipline.
- 5. Investigate long-term effects and individual differences:** Although this study found positive effects of the CILL approach, further research is needed to examine its long-term effects and understand how individual differences might influence these effects. This information will contribute to optimizing the CILL approach for different learners and learning contexts.
- 6. Explore the integration of technology:** With the rapid advancements in technology, there are increasing opportunities for integrating technology into the CILL approach. Future studies should explore how technology can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of the CILL approach. For example, online platforms can be used for providing additional language resources and facilitating collaboration between students.

In conclusion, the adoption and successful implementation of the CILL approach in Turkish universities hold significant promise for enhancing English language education. By taking into consideration these recommendations, it is possible to harness the full potential of the CILL approach and provide a more engaging, relevant, and effective language learning experience for students.

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