

## Defining foreign language needs among pre-service CLIL teachers

*Definiendo las necesidades idiomáticas entre profesores AICLE en formación inicial*

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### Abstract

CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) teacher training represents an educational challenge, where language competence and performance play a key role. So, the objective of the present research paper is to uncover the training needs of pre-service CLIL teachers (i.e., bachelor's degree in Primary Education students, 2020-21) at the University of Cádiz (Spain) concerning their English Foreign Language (EFL) skills. This is a mixed-methods research with a descriptive approach, in which the main research tool is The CEFR ALTE Skill Level Summaries (Council of Europe, 2001). The data analysis is based on a statistical study supported by beliefs of the informants using a quiz-based assessment tool (Socrative). The results reveal that written skills prevail over oral skills in EFL terms; there still exists a low number of qualified pre-service CLIL teachers in EFL; they have not yet achieved the necessary EFL proficiency to teach CLIL subjects; and finally, methodological training is also required and not just language training as far as CLIL teaching is concerned. Final recommendations are suggested.

**Keywords:** Bilingual education; english; foreign languages; primary education; teacher education.



## Resumen

La formación del profesorado AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenido y Lengua Extranjera) representa un reto educativo, donde la competencia y el rendimiento lingüístico juegan un papel fundamental. Así, el objetivo del presente trabajo de investigación es descubrir las necesidades de los profesores AICLE es formación inicial (estudiantes de Grado en Educación Primaria, 2020-21) de la Universidad de Cádiz (España) respecto a su competencia en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés). Se trata de una investigación de corte mixto con un alcance descriptivo, en la que la principal herramienta de investigación es el CEFR ALTE Skill Level (Consejo de Europa, 2001). El análisis de los datos se basa en un estudio estadístico apoyado en las creencias de los informantes recopiladas mediante una herramienta de evaluación basada en cuestionarios (Socrative). Los resultados revelan que las destrezas escritas prevalecen sobre las orales en términos EFL; existe un escaso número de profesores AICLE en formación inicial acreditados en EFL; estos todavía no han alcanzado la competencia necesaria en materia EFL para enseñar las asignaturas AICLE y, por último, se requiere una formación metodológica y no solo lingüística en lo que respecta a la enseñanza AICLE. Se presentan recomendaciones finales.

**Palabras clave:** Educación bilingüe; enseñanza primaria; inglés; lengua extranjera; formación de docentes.

## Introduction

Teacher training in Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) continues to represent one of the key educational challenges today (San Isidro, 2018; Custodio and García, 2020). The exponential increase in the number of bilingual and plurilingual schools in Andalusia (Lorenzo, 2019), Spain, has led to a readjustment of university degree curricula (Romero and Zayas, 2015). Specific CLIL training used to be limited to postgraduate courses, but now there are also specific undergraduate courses (Frigols, 2008).

The University of Cadiz, Andalusia, Spain, offers a specialization or *mención* in foreign language and CLIL in the bachelor's degree in Primary Education (Romero and Zayas, 2017). This includes four optional subjects of six ECTS credits each, two of which are devoted exclusively to



CLIL. The aim is for students to develop specific CLIL competences (Bertaux et al, 2009) from early stages.

A key feature of CLIL teacher training is the effectiveness of language teaching (Pavón and Rubio, 2010). Thus, in Andalusia, CLIL teachers are required to reach a minimum level of B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to work in public education (Consejería de Educación, 2011). Also, they should be able to understand that “whatever the content demands, the language has to support the content learning” (Coyle, 2010) in methodological terms. In other words, the nature of CLIL as a dual educational approach (Coyle et al, 2010) differs clearly from language teaching, as several longitudinal research studies have proved (c.f. Pérez, 2018).

This work reveals the beliefs of pre-service CLIL teachers at the University of Cadiz (2020-21) about their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) competence regarding the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, it uncovers their perceptions of whether their current EFL knowledge is proficient enough to work in primary education. Finally, it attempts to find out whether alternative training needs are also expected.

### ***Research Hypotheses and Objectives***

The research hypotheses are as follows:

1. The pre-service CLIL teachers believe that their level of competence in oral EFL is higher than in written EFL.
2. The pre-service CLIL teachers already have the official level of EFL (B2) required to work in public education in Andalusia.
3. The pre-service CLIL teachers consider that their EFL skills are not yet sufficiently proficient for teaching CLIL subjects.
4. The pre-service CLIL teachers are aware of their training needs in EFL and methodology.

The general objective is to discover the training needs of pre-service CLIL teachers about their language skills in EFL. In addition, four specific objectives are listed below:

1. To compare the pre-service CLIL teachers' opinions about their competence in EFL for oral and written language.
2. To know about the official proficiency levels in EFL of all pre-service CLIL teachers.



3. To find out the pre-service CLIL teachers' perceptions about their ability to teach content subjects through EFL.
4. To identify other types of training needs among the pre-service CLIL teachers other than EFL skills if relevant.

## Method

This is a mixed-methods research study, which adopts a descriptive approach, as it aims to identify the profile of informants as future CLIL teachers in primary education in terms of their training needs.

The participants are 95% of the university students (N=40) who regularly (80% of classroom attendance, at least) attended the subject *AICLE I: Fundamentos y Propuestas Curriculares para el Aula de Primaria* (AICLE I) in the academic year 2020-21. As said, this is an optional subject in the specialization in Foreign Language (English)/CLIL in the bachelor's degree in Primary Education, Faculty of Educational Science, at the University of Cádiz. All informants are native speakers of Spanish, except for one Erasmus student whose mother tongue is Finnish. Moreover, 32 students (80%) are female while 8 students (20%) are male.

Two research tools were applied. First, the CEFR *ALTE Skill Level Summaries* (Council of Europe, 2001) was used to collect quantitative data. It includes a list of competences for the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Second, the computer application Socrative (<https://www.socrative.com>) was used to collect qualitative data. It helped to collect the informants' views on whether their current EFL knowledge is sufficiently proficient to teach CLIL subjects in primary education, and whether they also specify training needs other than EFL.

The research was carried out during a hands-on practical session of 1:30 hours. First, the pre-service CLIL teachers were asked to highlight the CEFR Can-Do action they can perform. For this, an MS Excel file was created, which included a tab with the learners' full names, assigning a number (1, 2, 3...) to each one of them. This file also included a tab for each student with several CEFR Can-Do actions they thought they could perform. Once it was done, they had to access the Socrative quiz to answer two questions: The first question was about whether their current knowledge of EFL is sufficient to teach CLIL subjects in primary education. The second question was about what their training needs were, with the possibility of choosing training other than EFL itself.



The data analysis is based on a statistical study supported by the perceptions and beliefs of the pre-service CLIL teachers.

## Results

The results of the CEFR *ALTE Skill Level Summaries* (Can-Do list) are presented below according to the pre-service CLIL teachers' (N=40) opinions. For Listening/Speaking, 25% chose Level 3, while 22.5% did so for Levels 5 and 1, respectively. The lowest percentages correspond to the Breakthrough Level (BL) (5%) and Level 2 (7.5%). Concerning Reading, 30% chose Level 4, while 27.5% selected Level 2. Also, 17.5% picked Level 5 and another 17.5% chose Level 3. Finally, the BL and Level 1 were the least chosen options: 5% and 2.5% respectively. Finally, as for Writing, 37.5% chose Level 3, while 25% preferred Level 4 and another 25% opted for Level 2. Vis-à-vis the least selected options, Levels 5, 1, and the BL stand out with 7.5%, 5%, and 0%, respectively. Table 1 shows the data distribution among EFL skills:

*Table 1.* ELF Skills

Level	Can-Do	N	%
<b>Listening/Speaking</b>			
5	CAN advise on or talk about complex or sensitive issues, understanding colloquial references and dealing confidently with hostile questions.	9	22,5
4	CAN contribute effectively to meetings and seminars within own area of work or keep up a casual conversation with a good degree of fluency, coping with abstract expressions.	7	17,5
3	CAN follow or give a talk on a familiar topic or keep up a conversation on a fairly wide range of topics.	10	25
2	CAN express opinions on abstract/ cultural matters in a limited way or offer advice within a known area and understand instructions or public announcements.	3	7,5
1	CAN express simple opinions or requirements in a familiar context.	9	22,5
BL	CAN understand basic instructions or take part in a basic factual conversation on a predictable topic.	2	5
<b>Reading</b>			
5	CAN understand documents, correspondence, and reports, including the finer points of complex texts.	7	17,5
4	CAN read quickly enough to cope with an academic course, to read the media for information or to understand non- standard correspondence.	12	30
3	CAN scan texts for relevant information and understand detailed instructions or advice.	7	17,5



2	CAN understand routine information and articles, and the general meaning of non-routine information within a familiar area.	11	27,5
1	CAN understand straightforward information within a known area, such as on products and signs and simple textbooks or reports on familiar matters.	2	5
BL	CAN understand basic notices, instructions, or information.	1	2,5
<b>Writing</b>			
5	CAN write letters on any subject and full notes of meetings or seminars with good expression and accuracy.	3	7,5
4	CAN prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate.	10	25
3	CAN make notes while someone is talking or write a letter including non-standard requests.	15	37.5
2	CAN write letters or make notes on familiar or predictable matters.	10	25
1	CAN complete forms and write short simple letters or postcards related to personal information.	2	5
BL	CAN complete basic forms, and write notes including times, dates, and places.	0	0

As far as the proficiency EFL level of the pre-service CLIL teachers is concerned, 30% have a B1; 42.5% have a B2; 10% have a C1; and 17.5% have no official certificate. In this sense, the University of Cádiz demands a minimum level of B1 in any foreign language for students to graduate. Likewise, the *Junta de Andalucía* (Andalusian Regional Government) requires a B2 level to be eligible to work in public schools. So, when asked:

- “Are your current EFL skills sufficiently proficient to teach CLIL subjects in primary education?”, 62.5% answered “No”, while 37.5% said “Yes”.
- “Is there any other specific training you consider becoming a CLIL teacher?”, 37.5% stated that they need CLIL-related methodology training.

## Discussion

### *Written Skills Prevail Over Oral Skills*

The results reveal that according to the pre-service CLIL teachers’ CEFR picks, the advanced Levels 4 and 5 relate mainly to Reading (47.5%), followed by Listening/Speaking



(40%), and Writing (32.5%). Concerning the intermediate Levels 2 and 3, Reading also displays the highest percentage (45%), followed by Listening/Speaking (32.5%) and Writing (25%). The trend changes for the basic levels: Level 1 and the BL: Speaking/Listening (27.5%), Reading (7.5%), and Writing (5%). Thus, the pre-service CLIL teachers believe that their highest knowledge in terms of EFL proficiency focuses on Reading for intermediate Levels 3 and 4, and for advanced Levels 4 and 5.

As a result, a poorly developed teaching competence in oral EFL may affect language treatment (Chen and Goh, 2011) in the classroom. Vis-à-vis the Andalusian Curriculum (Consejería de Educación, 2015), the methodological guideline for foreign language teaching (*área: primera lengua extranjera*) points out that “in primary education, priority is given to the development of communication skills; oral skills will be emphasized in the early grades, while in the later grades, skills will be developed gradually and in an integrated way.” (p. 6; *personal translation*).

### ***Low Number of Qualified Pre-Service CLIL Teachers in EFL***

The data reveal that only half of the informants (52.5%) have an official B2 level, which is the minimum level required by the *Junta de Andalucía* to teach CLIL subjects in public education, or C1 level, which is the minimum recommended level (Lorenzo, 2019). It is worth noting that 17.5% do not yet have any official EFL certificate. The informants must, at least, obtain a B1 level to graduate. It can be then easily inferred that most informants point directly to language training: Even though more than half of them (52.5%) have an official certificate (B2), 62.5% consider that their EFL competence is not sufficiently proficient to work as CLIL teachers (Fortanez, 2013; Lorenzo, 2019). Perhaps their perception of EFL proficiency is affected by the CLIL integration of content and foreign language (Papaja, 2014). The definition of CLIL as a dual-educational approach demands specific training for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Cortina-Pérez and Pino, 2021). Among the several training areas, language instruction stands out, intending to put “[the] linguistic knowledge on a pedagogic level” (Pavón and Rubio, 2010, p. 51) at the service of students.

### ***Methodological Training is Required and Not Just Language Training***

37,5% of pre-service CLIL teachers consider that more methodological training is required –as Milla and Casas (2018) found out among in-service CLIL teachers in Almería, Córdoba, Granada, and Jaén (Andalusia)– and not only language knowledge. CLIL requires teachers to



recognise the very own characteristics of the approach (Pérez, 2013) that are different from those of language and content teaching. They begin to recognise progressively the differences between CLIL and other bilingual models of education that do not consider the integration of content and foreign language (Pérez, 2020); e.g., English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Thus, their perception of CLIL seems to move them away from teaching practices concerning the simple translation of contents (Working CLIL Digital, 2018), among others.

## Conclusions

This research reveals the existence of language training needs within the group of pre-service CLIL teachers (N=40) analysed. This is due to two main reasons: First, they must obtain a B1 level to graduate and a B2 level to work in public education. Second, whether having a language certificate or not, they still believe that further language training is required. Therefore, according to the pre-service CLIL teachers' own beliefs:

- Reading is the highest-ranked skill concerning the CEFR *ALTE Skill Level Summaries* (Levels 2 and 3, and Levels 4 and 5).
- 52.5% still do not have the CEFR certificate to work in public education in Andalusia, while only 10% have the expected minimum level (C1).
- 62.5% consider that they have not yet achieved the necessary EFL competence to teach CLIL subjects.
- 37.5% believe that they also require CLIL methodological training after having taking part in AICLE I.

Moreover, the novelty of this work lies in the recognition of language (i.e., EFL) training needs by the pre-service CLIL teachers. However, it is based on subjective tests of personal performance rather than on specific tests of language proficiency, which might have identified more specific training needs in reading, speaking, reading, and writing in EFL. Taking the results of this research into account, some recommendations for educational institutions (e.g., Universities) in relation to CLIL training are listed below:

1. Pre-service CLIL teachers should receive clear information about the specific qualifications necessary for CLIL teaching by the time they start tertiary education. In addition, they are also expected to receive specific information before joining the degree specialization.



2. Pre-service CLIL teachers should start the specialization holding at least the minimum official CEFR level expected by the educational institution itself for graduation (e.g., B1 certificate in the case of the University of Cádiz). This would simplify their incorporation into foreign language teaching or CLIL subjects, avoiding potential problems of comprehension and participation, among others.
3. Pre-service CLIL teachers should have the possibility of attending language classes free of charge, despite their competence level of EFL. In addition, they should have the possibility to attend language classes oriented exclusively towards the development of CLIL teaching skills. Finally, it could be also possible to organise stays abroad.

Future research lines almost necessarily involve individualised monitoring of pre-service CLIL teachers in terms of language training from the very first moment they begin tertiary education. This would help to gain more and better knowledge of the development of their language skills throughout the whole bachelor's degree. Perhaps, it would also be possible to record the steps they take after completing their university studies to check the effectiveness of the language training, getting first-hand information about whether they have entered the labour market and under what circumstances.

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