

## Understanding EMI and CLIL: Literature review

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**Abstract.** Exploring educational contexts, this literature review examines the distinctions between English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). While both instructional styles aim to enhance language proficiency alongside subject knowledge, they also exhibit distinct pedagogical approaches, objectives, and implementation strategies. The main emphasis of English-Medium Instruction is on delivering material, with a secondary focus on developing language skills. Content and Language Integrated Learning effectively combines subject and language goals, ensuring thorough integration of both aspects. This review meticulously analyses recent studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced differences and similarities between EMI and CLIL. Employing a systematic approach, various academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR were exhaustively searched using targeted search terms to identify pertinent research published from 2010 to 2024. The findings illuminate various aspects of each approach, offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers, and highlight the implications for teacher training and institutional support. It emphasizes the importance of a profound understanding of these instructional differences to make well-informed decisions tailored to specific educational settings and goals. Such knowledge is crucial for contributing to the evolving discourse on bilingual and multilingual education strategies and enhancing educational outcomes in diverse learning environments.



**Key words:** EMI, CLIL, literature review, English



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**Introduction.** It is widely acknowledged that higher education institutions have undergone substantial internationalization in recent years [1]. Introducing English-medium instruction (EMI) in college and university

is a vital component of internationalization. EMI refers to the practice of teaching courses in English in environments where English is not commonly used in everyday communication [2]. Universities often include EMI in

their internationalization policies to attract international students and improve communication among students from diverse language backgrounds [3].

EMI has also been seen as an opportunity for learners to improve their language proficiency [4]. The use of EMI for this purpose is founded on the belief that language acquisition occurs only via exposure to English material due to the immersive character of EMI [5]. Some argue that in certain situations, EMI becomes partially CLILised, which means that EMI is used not only for delivering content, but also as a way for students to enhance their language skills [6]. The acronym Integrating Content and Language is often used in tertiary institutions to describe courses that incorporate both content and language learning outcomes. EMI is seen as a platform primarily focused on disciplinary subject learning, with limited opportunities for developing academic and disciplinary languages.

It is important to recognize that EMI and CLIL are often used interchangeably, which might result in misunderstandings while implementing and evaluating them. Tedick [7] asserted that CLIL courses have become widely recognized as a method of teaching English in continental Europe, South America, Asia, and other regions. Although both systems aim to improve language competence and topic knowledge, their educational foundations and aims vary dramatically. This study examined the differences between EMI and CLIL. The objective was to clearly define the differences and similarities between these approaches, offering significant knowledge for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

It is important to understand the differences between EMI and CLIL for various reasons. This allows educators to choose the most suitable approach for their unique educational contexts and objectives. Additionally, it provides policymakers with valuable insights into the resources and training needed for successful program implementation. Furthermore, it adds to the academ-

ic conversation surrounding bilingual and multilingual education by providing a clear understanding of theoretical and practical differences between EMI and CLIL.

## Materials and methods

This literature review employed a systematic approach to find, assess, and integrate relevant articles on EMI and CLIL. Keywords such as “English Medium Instruction,” “Content and Language Integrated Learning,” “EMI vs. CLIL,” and “bilingual education” were used to search databases, such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Studies published between 2010 and 2024 were included to guarantee the incorporation of the latest advancements and viewpoints.

**Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion.** Inclusion criteria were studies that presented empirical data, theoretical analysis, or comprehensive literature reviews on EMI and/or CLIL. The exclusion criteria included studies that failed to distinguish between the two techniques or lacked a well-defined methodological framework.

**Data analysis.** Data were obtained from the selected studies, with a specific emphasis on the definitions, teaching methods, instructor qualifications, student results, and implementation settings of EMI and CLIL. Thematic analysis was used to uncover popular themes and patterns across research.

## Results and Discussion

### Defining EMI and CLIL

#### English Medium Instruction (EMI)

EMI is the practice of teaching students in academic disciplines using English in territories where the language is not official. The primary focus of EMI is on the delivery of content knowledge, with incidental language learning. EMI programs are prevalent in higher education institutions, particularly in non-Anglophone countries, aiming to internationalize their education systems [8].

### **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**

CLIL is an educational approach in which content and language learning objectives are integrated. Unlike EMI, CLIL explicitly aims to develop subject-specific knowledge and language skills simultaneously. CLIL can be implemented at various educational levels, from primary to tertiary education, and

is characterized by its dual-focused nature, promoting language awareness alongside content mastery [9].

To understand EMI and CLIL, it is crucial to examine how they have been defined by different scholars and institutions. This section brings together definitions from various sources to emphasize the main features and differences of each approach (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Definitions of EMI and CLIL**

EMI	CLIL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The language goals are not explicitly stated, although the major focus is on students' intellectual knowledge [10].</li> <li>• Means that courses in economic history, chemistry, and aeronautical engineering are taught and studied using English as the language of teaching. It often does not prioritise language acquisition or particular language goals [11].</li> <li>• Academic disciplines taught by teachers that do not directly pertain to the objective of enhancing students' English proficiency are referred to as a catch-all phrase [3].</li> <li>• Acquiring academic information is the primary goal of university-level courses taught in English [12].</li> <li>• the practice of instructing students in academic disciplines via the medium of English in territories where English is not a first language [8].</li> <li>• refers to the use of English in academic contexts by both students and content instructors, regardless of their location. This may include many forms of English usage, such as sole use, partial use, and code swapping, for the aim of studying or teaching topics other than English [13].</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the use of various techniques, dual-focused education is achieved, wherein subject matter and the language are given equal weight [14].</li> <li>• Certain components of the curriculum are taught using a non native language. Learners naturally learn the intended language [15].</li> <li>• Learners participate in a collaborative learning activity that involves both the content of a certain topic and the acquisition of a foreign language [16].</li> <li>• CLIL encompasses all educational approaches in which topics are acquired either via a second language (L2) or through the simultaneous use of two languages [17].</li> <li>• Foreign language instructors are responsible for conducting CLIL lessons, while the primary focus is on language acquisition through academic content [18].</li> </ul>

*Note: based on literature review*

After a closer examination of these definitions, it becomes evident that EMI and CLIL have distinct methodologies and primary objectives, despite both aiming to use a foreign language for instruction. EMI primarily

focuses on content delivery with secondary language benefits, while CLIL places equal importance on material and language learning via integrated instructional methods. This distinction is important for educators

and policymakers when making decisions about which approach to implement, considering their unique educational contexts and objectives.

### **Key Differences Between EMI and CLIL**

EMI and CLIL have distinct objectives and implementation strategies, although they both aim to improve students' content knowledge and language competency. EMI places its emphasis on content delivery, with language learning being seen as a secondary, unintentional advantage [2]. This approach emphasizes content and expects learners to improve their language proficiency on their own through immersion without relying heavily on explicit language support. In comparison, CLIL takes a deliberate approach to combining language learning and content instruction, resulting in a balanced approach that emphasizes both subject-specific knowledge and language competency [9].

There is a significant distinction between the pedagogical strategies used by each approach. EMI usually consists of conventional teaching methods that prioritize content along with informal language support. In EMI courses, teachers often possess a high level of proficiency in English and specialized knowledge in their respective fields. However, they may lack professional training in language-teaching methodologies [8]. In contrast, CLIL uses a combination of teaching methods, such as scaffolding, task-based learning, and formative assessment, to help students develop both their knowledge and language abilities. Teachers who engage in CLIL must possess profound comprehension of the subject topic and proficiency in successfully instructing language [9]. They often receive specialized training to ensure that they can effectively handle the dual-focused approach.

There were differences in student outcomes between EMI and CLIL. EMI students typically demonstrate effective comprehension of subject matter, although their language skills may vary depending on their previous

exposure to English and the level of language support they receive. Students who engage in CLIL tend to make equal progress in content and language proficiency, because of the integrated approach. This well-rounded progress is credited to the emphasis that CLIL places on clear language goals and supportive teaching methods.

Despite these differences, there are some similarities between EMI and CLIL. Both approaches aim to enhance students' understanding of academic subjects and fluency in English. To achieve this, English was used as the primary language of instruction. They are affected by educational policies that strive to enhance language proficiency and academic standards. Proficiency in English and subject knowledge are necessary for both, although the level of language-teaching skills may differ.

Regarding assessment, EMI places a strong emphasis on content knowledge while also incorporating informal assessments of language skills. CLIL incorporates formative assessment content and language skills, offering a more thorough evaluation of students' progress. Differences in assessment practices highlight the contrasting priorities of each approach. EMI focuses on mastering content, while CLIL aims for a well-rounded development of language and content equally.

Students' experiences with EMI and CLIL can vary based on the level of language support offered. EMI students may encounter difficulties owing to limited formal language assistance, resulting in different levels of language proficiency. CLIL creates a nurturing atmosphere that focuses on clear language goals, leading to improved language achievement among students. In CLIL, students are able to navigate the complexities of learning content through a foreign language more effectively because of the supportive environment.

EMI and CLIL are components of wider internationalization and educational policies. EMI is frequently incorporated into strategies aimed at attracting a wide range of students and boosting global rankings in

line with institutions' objectives to enhance their international appeal. CLIL is supported by policies that seek to improve multilingual skills and promote intercultural understanding, which are influenced by its origins in European educational settings.

To fully understand the similarities and differences between EMI and CLIL, it is beneficial to make direct comparisons. This table compares different aspects, including goals, pedagogical strategies, teacher qualifications, and student outcomes (see Table 2).

**Table 2 – Similarities and differences between EMI and CLIL**

Aspect	EMI	CLIL	Similarities
Goals	Primary goal is content delivery with incidental language learning.	Dual-focused goals of content and language learning.	Both aim to enhance subject knowledge and language proficiency.
Pedagogical Strategies	Content-driven approach with minimal explicit language support.	Integrated approach using scaffolding, task-based learning, and formative assessment.	Both use English as the medium of instruction to teach academic subjects.
Teacher Qualifications	Teachers are subject experts with proficiency in English, often without formal language teaching training.	Teachers require both subject knowledge and language teaching skills, often receiving specialized training.	Both require teachers to have proficiency in English and subject knowledge.
Implementation Contexts	Commonly adopted in higher education to attract international students and enhance global competitiveness.	Implemented across educational levels, particularly in primary and secondary education, to promote bilingualism.	Both are implemented in non-English-speaking regions to enhance educational outcomes.
Assessment	Focused primarily on content knowledge, with language skills assessed informally.	Formative assessment of both content knowledge and language skills.	Both utilize English-language assessments to measure student progress.

*Note: based on literature review*

### **Challenges of EMI**

Overcoming language proficiency barriers is a major challenge for students in EMI programmes. It has been extensively found that students who are not fluent in English often face difficulties in comprehending complex academic content. This, in turn, can result in knowledge gaps and hinder overall academic performance [2]. This challenge be-

comes especially difficult when institutions fail to offer sufficient language support, leaving students to navigate their learning environments without the necessary linguistic tools. Furthermore, students in EMI programs face a significant cognitive load. Processing new academic concepts while understanding the language of instruction can be challenging, as it puts a lot of cog-

nitive strain on students. This can result in increased stress levels and potentially lower academic performance. EMI places a heavy cognitive load on students, which is exacerbated by the absence of proper language support. Many EMI programs prioritize the delivery of content rather than focusing on language development. This method may result in students not receiving the required support to enhance their English skills, which can make their learning experience more challenging and potentially affect their academic performance [8].

Teachers in EMI settings often encounter considerable obstacles. Although EMI teachers are typically knowledgeable in their respective subjects, their English proficiency may hinder their ability to effectively teach them. These factors can lead to misunderstandings, less clear explanations, and challenges in responding to language-related questions. Additionally, many teachers in this situation do not have formal training in language teaching methodologies. This can make it difficult for them to implement effective strategies that promote language learning and teaching content. Preparing instructional materials in a foreign language can be demanding, as it requires additional time and effort to ensure that they are clear and easy to understand. This task can be particularly challenging for teachers who are non-native English speakers.

Implementing EMI in tertiary education in Kazakhstan presents a variety of difficulties. These include a range of challenges such as language, managerial, cultural, and emotional obstacles that require attention and resolution. Enhancing English proficiency is essential for both students and staff. It could be achieved via language classes, online exercises, conversation with native speakers, and reading and writing assignments. These activities are important to ensure that individuals have the necessary language skills [19]. From a managerial perspective, it is important to ensure that there are sufficient instructional resources, such as textbooks and other materials, and to provide proper training for instructors who may not be familiar with teaching in EMI environments. Integrating into the academic environment

can be particularly challenging for students in EMI classrooms because of cultural differences. Having sufficient support and resources is crucial to help students overcome these challenges. This includes having access to native English-speaking teachers and international students, and engaging in cultural activities. To address emotional challenges such as anxiety among learners, it is crucial to give necessary support. This can be done through additional tutoring sessions or mentorship programs, which can offer students someone to rely on when they face difficulties [19].

### **Challenges of CLIL**

CLIL programs require students to manage content as well as language acquisition effectively. Dealing with the dual focus of CLIL can pose challenges, particularly for students with a lower proficiency in the target language. There are noticeable differences in language proficiency among students, which can result in unequal learning outcomes. Students with stronger language skills tend to advance at a faster pace than their peers do, leading to varying learning experiences within the same classroom. In CLIL settings, the assessment of both content knowledge and language proficiency can be complex. It can be challenging to assess students' overall abilities when they excel in one area but struggle with another. This adds complexity to the evaluation procedure and hinders the ability to provide an impartial evaluation. [20].

Teachers face a significant challenge with CLIL as it demands expertise in both subject matter and language teaching. Teachers need to have strong command of the target language and be able to seamlessly incorporate language and content learning. This requires continuous, thorough professional development. Creating teaching materials that effectively integrate content and language objectives is a challenging task that requires meticulous planning and innovative thinking. It is crucial to design resources that support language acquisition, while effectively delivering academic content. Managing a CLIL classroom requires a higher level of effort than traditional settings. It

is important for teachers to closely observe and assist students in their language development, while ensuring that they adequately cover academic content. This may result in elevated levels of stress and an augmented burden for instructors.

## Conclusion

Through the literature review, this study examined various aspects of EMI and CLIL, shedding light on their definitions, differences, similarities, and obstacles.

EMI and CLIL, although sometimes used interchangeably, has distinct definitions and objectives. EMI prioritises the use of the English language for instructing subjects related to learning in environments where English is not the main spoken language, with a specific emphasis on effectively communicating knowledge while also promoting language acquisition. CLIL integrates content and language learning objectives to improve subject-specific knowledge and language competency simultaneously. EMI and CLIL differ significantly in terms of educational techniques, teacher qualifications, student results, and implementation situations. EMI adopts a strategy that prioritises content and has little explicit language assistance, whereas CLIL employs techniques like scaffolding and task-based learning to promote the growth of both content and language abilities. EMI instructors often possess extensive expertise in their respective subjects and have a high level of skill in English, although they may not have had professional training in language education. On the other hand, CLIL instructors must possess extensive knowledge in both the content they teach and the methods of language learning, frequently undergoing specialised training.

Although EMI and CLIL have distinct characteristics, they also share several commonalities. Both strive to improve students' understanding of academic subjects and their ability to effectively communicate in English. They are impacted by educational policies that strive to enhance language proficiency and academic standards, neces-

sitating teachers who are skilled in English and knowledgeable about their respective subjects. Both approaches are utilized in regions where English is not the primary language for improving educational results and promoting academic and professional opportunities.

The challenges associated with EMI and CLIL are significant and complex. Students enrolled in EMI programs have difficulties related to their language skills, suffer a greater mental effort, and frequently lack official language assistance, leading to possible shortcomings in their academic achievements. Teachers in EMI contexts may have difficulties in successfully communicating in English, lack formal training in language teaching methodologies, and need more time to prepare for sessions. In Kazakhstan, it is necessary to tackle a range of issues, including language, managerial, cultural, and emotional obstacles. In order to effectively carry out EMI, it is essential to possess language courses, educational materials, cultural assistance, and supervision.

Students in CLIL programs face the challenge of juggling content and language learning. However, varying levels of language proficiency can result in unequal learning outcomes. Evaluating both content and language skills increases the level of difficulty. Teachers who specialize in CLIL must possess a unique set of skills and face the challenge of creating teaching materials that seamlessly integrate content and language while effectively managing classrooms with multiple objectives in mind. Both EMI and CLIL require robust institutional backing, encompassing teacher professional development, language support services for students, and resources for creating instructional materials.

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## EMI және CLIL түсінігі: әдеби шолу

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**Аңдатпа.** Білім беру контекстерін зерттей отырып, бұл әдебиет шолуында ағылшын тілінде сабақ беру (English Medium Instruction) және Мазмұн мен тілді бірік-



тірілген оқыту (Content and Language Integrated Learning) арасындағы айырмашылықтар қарастырылады. Оқытудың екі стилі де пәндік біліммен қатар тілді меңгеруді арттыруды мақсат еткенімен, оларда әртүрлі педагогикалық тәсілдер, мақсаттар және жүзеге асыру стратегиялары қолданылады. Ағылшын тілінде сабақ беру (EMI) бірінші кезекте мазмұнды жеткізуге баса назар аударып, тіл дамытуды екінші орынға қояды. Ал Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) кепісінше екі бағытты да бір уақытта жақсартуға ықпал ететін мазмұн мен тілдік мақсаттарды мұқият біріктіреді. Бұл шолу EMI мен CLIL арасындағы кейбір айырмашылықтары мен ұқсастықтарын жан-жақты түсіну үшін соңғы зерттеулерді мұқият талдайды. Шолудың жүйелік тәсілін қолдана отырып, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar және JSTOR сияқты әртүрлі академиялық дерекқорларда 2010-2024 жылдар аралығында жарияланған сәйкес зерттеулерді анықтау үшін мақсатты іздеу терминдері арқылы жан-жақты қарастырылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері мұғалімдерге, саясаткерлерге және зерттеушілерге құнды түсініктер ұсынатын және мұғалімдерді дайындау мен институционалдық қолдаудың салдарын көрсететін әрбір тәсілдің әртүрлі аспектілерін айғақтайды. Нақты білім беру контексттері мен мақсаттарын ескере отырып негізделген шешімдер қабылдау үшін осы оқу айырмашылықтарын мұқият түсінудің маңыздылығын атап көрсетеді. Мұндай мәлімет әртүрлі оқу орталарында оқу нәтижелерін жақсартатын екітілді және көптілді білім беру стратегиялары туралы дамып келе жатқан дискурсқа үлес қосу үшін өте маңызды.

 **Түйінді сөздер:** EMI, CLIL, әдеби шолу, ағылшын тілі


## Понимание EMI и CLIL: обзор литературы

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 **Аннотация.** В обзоре литературы, посвященном образовательным контекстам, рассматриваются различия между обучением на английском языке (EMI) и интегрированным обучением на основе содержания и языка (CLIL). Хотя оба стиля обучения направлены на повышение уровня владения языком наряду со знанием предмета, они демонстрируют различные педагогические подходы, цели и стратегии реализации. При обучении на английском языке основное внимание уделяется передаче содержания, а второстепенное - развитию языка. В отличие от этого, интегрированное обучение по содержанию и языку тщательно объединяет задачи по содержанию и языку, способствуя одновременному совершенствованию в обеих областях. В данном обзоре тщательно анализируются последние исследования, чтобы обеспечить всестороннее понимание нюансов различий и сходств между EMI и CLIL. Используя систематический подход, различные академические базы данных, такие как Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar и JSTOR, были тщательно изучены с использованием целевых поисковых терминов для выявления соответствующих исследований, опубликованных в период с 2010 по 2024 год. Сделанные выводы освещают различные аспекты каждого подхода, предлагая ценные идеи для педагогов, политиков и исследователей, а также указывая на последствия для подготовки учителей и институциональной поддержки. Подчеркивается важность глубокого понимания этих различий в обучении для принятия обоснованных решений, учитывающих конкретные условия и цели образования. Такие знания крайне важны для внесения вклада в развивающийся дискурс о стратегиях двуязычного и многоязычного образования, улучшающих результаты обучения в разнообразных учебных средах.

 **Ключевые слова:** EMI, CLIL, литературный обзор, английский язык

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