

A CLIL-Based Approach to Integrating “News Aggregation” with Values Education in an International Trade Practice Course

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Abstract: This paper proposes a CLIL-based pedagogical design integrating values education into a Chinese university International Trade Practice course. Addressing the “two-skin phenomenon”—the disconnect between professional knowledge and values cultivation—we introduce an innovative “News Aggregation” approach as a contextualized CLIL strategy. Grounded in CLIL’s 4Cs framework, our design uses authentic news materials to create dynamic, experiential learning environments that simultaneously develop disciplinary knowledge, Business English proficiency, and ethical awareness, fostering cultural confidence and global responsibility. Through a detailed module-based redesign, we demonstrate how CLIL can support dual-focused instruction, enhancing engagement and critical thinking while incorporating civic values into professional education, preparing globally qualified graduates with a strong national identity. Our study contributes to international CLIL discourse by offering a transferable blueprint for integrating language, content, and values in specialized higher education contexts.

Keywords: CLIL; Values education; News Aggregation; International Trade Practice; Higher education; China

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1. Introduction

Globalization has fundamentally reshaped the demands facing higher education. Today’s graduates require not only disciplinary expertise and advanced language skills but also a critical, ethically-grounded global consciousness ^[1]. In China, this educational vision is articulated through the national goal of cultivating talent with “global vision, Chinese perspective, and professional competence.” A key mechanism for achieving this aim is curriculum-based values education—a policy initiative mandating the integration of civic values across all academic disciplines. Yet implementation often suffers from the “two-skin phenomenon,” where professional knowledge and values education remain artificially separated, resulting in mechanical or superficial add-ons of political content ^[2].

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) offers a promising framework to bridge this gap. Developed in Europe to support multilingual education, CLIL integrates content learning with additional language acquisition, treating language as both medium and object of study^[3]. Its 4Cs framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture—provides a coherent structure for blending knowledge, language use, higher-order thinking, and cultural awareness. This theoretical alignment makes CLIL particularly adaptable to contexts like China, where the “Culture” dimension can be thoughtfully expanded to incorporate national values and identity within professional learning communities^[4].

This paper examines the deliberate integration of CLIL principles with a “News Aggregation” pedagogical method in an International Trade Practice course in a Chinese university. Our News Aggregation approach harnesses the timeliness, authenticity, and interdisciplinary nature of news media—sourced from both domestic and international outlets—to create dynamic, relevant learning contexts. We argue that systematically applying CLIL’s 4Cs framework to structure news-based modules allows instructors to interweave professional mastery, English language development, and values cultivation rather than treating them as separate objectives.

This study has three aims: (1) to explore the theoretical interplay between the CLIL framework and values-infused curriculum design; (2) to present a comprehensive, module-based course redesign using a CLIL-informed News Aggregation approach; and (3) to discuss how this model addresses practical CLIL implementation challenges, including integrated assessment and cognitive scaffolding. In doing so, it contributes to the international literature on CLIL localization and offers a concrete, replicable model for holistic professional education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction of CLIL

CLIL represents a dual-focused educational approach where an additional language serves as both a vehicle for content learning and an object of systematic study^[3]. Emerging from European multilingualism policies, CLIL aims to foster integrated academic and linguistic competencies. The approach draws on sociocultural theory, emphasizing knowledge co-construction and scaffolding within learners’ zones of proximal development^[5]. From a cognitive perspective, engaging with complex disciplinary content through a foreign language stimulates higher-order thinking and deeper linguistic processing^[6]. This aligns with the development of cognitive discourse functions—defining, classifying, evaluating, hypothesizing—that are central to academic and professional communication^[7]. Furthermore, Cummins’ distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) clarifies CLIL’s objective: developing the abstract, context-reduced language proficiency required for specialized discourse beyond everyday conversational fluency^[8].

2.2. Global applications and local adaptations

CLIL implementation varies considerably across educational contexts. In Europe, a spectrum exists from content-driven “hard CLIL,” typically taught by subject specialists, to language-oriented “soft CLIL,” often led by language teachers^[9]. In Asia, CLIL has been adapted to support national educational reforms. In China, for instance, CLIL has been strategically localized to collaborate with curriculum-based values education, leading to innovative applications in fields such as international law and traditional Chinese medicine, where CLIL methodologies simultaneously develop professional English literacy and civic values^[4,10]. In Latin America, scholars advocate for “situated CLIL” employing translanguaging strategies and critical, decolonial perspectives

to validate local linguistic repertoires and address social justice concerns ^[11]. These diverse adaptations underscore CLIL’s flexibility while highlighting ongoing debates about linguistic equity, cultural relevance, and implicit linguistic imperialism.

2.3. The 4Cs Framework and its evolution

This study adopts the 4Cs Framework ^[3] as its core theoretical perspective. The framework posits that effective CLIL requires holistic integration of four interwoven dimensions: Content (subject matter mastery), Communication (using language to construct and express meaning), Cognition (thinking skill development), and Culture (fostering intercultural understanding and citizenship). It suggests that it is through progression in knowledge, skills, and understanding of the content, engagement in associated cognitive processing, interaction in the communicative context, and exposure to different cultural perspectives that effective CLIL takes place. None of these elements is isolated; they are in a constant state of interaction. A key strength is its insistence on interconnectedness rather than additive treatment of these elements. The Communication dimension is realized through the Language Triptych, distinguishing between language of learning (core vocabulary and structures), for learning (classroom interaction), and through learning (language emerging from activities) ^[3].

Recent scholarship has refined the framework, particularly the Culture component, expanding it toward critical intercultural citizenship—engaging learners in analyzing power structures and grappling with global issues ^[1]. This evolution resonates with the Pluriliteracies approach, emphasizing how learners develop subject-specific “voice” through multimodal and genre-based expressions ^[12]. In China, CLIL (often contextualized as Content Language Integrated Education) has attracted significant interest and is frequently discussed in conjunction with national educational reforms, such as the CBI approach and the New Liberal Arts initiative ^[13]. Chinese researchers have explicitly positioned CLIL as an effective framework for implementing curriculum values education, arguing that its integrated 4Cs model provides a structured pathway for blending value cultivation with disciplinary and linguistic learning ^[2]. Our “News Aggregation” method resonates with this trajectory: it supplies authentic Content through real-world news, creates genuine Communication needs through analytical tasks, stimulates Cognition through evaluation and critique, and offers a direct pathway to Culture by presenting diverse perspectives on China’s global role, enabling guided reflection on values and identity.

3. Methodology: A design-based research approach

We employed design-based research, a methodology well-suited for developing and refining educational interventions through iterative cycles of design, implementation, analysis, and redesign in authentic settings ^[14]. The primary outcome is the pedagogical design itself—a comprehensive CLIL-based restructuring of an International Trade Practice course using the “News Aggregation” method.

3.1. Context and participants

The design targets a compulsory International Trade Practice course taught in English to third-year English majors at a Chinese university. Students typically enter with intermediate English proficiency (B1–B2 on the CEFR scale) and foundational knowledge in economics and business. Their developmental stage makes them particularly receptive to critical thinking tasks and values-laden discussions relevant to global trade.

3.2. The CLIL-informed news aggregation design framework

Our course redesign operates on two conceptual levels: the overarching 4Cs framework and five operational principles distilled from CLIL literature and the Chinese educational context ^[2]:

- (1) Balanced focus principle: Ensuring equal attention to language, content, and values objectives in planning and instruction.
- (2) Authentic context principle: Using real news materials to create meaningful, realistic professional settings.
- (3) Learning-by-using principle: Designing immediate, purposeful output tasks requiring application.
- (4) Higher-order thinking principle: Embedding cognitive operations—analysis, evaluation, synthesis, creation—into activities.
- (5) Assessment-for-learning principle: Employing multidimensional evaluation tools to monitor progress across all three domains.

The 16-week course includes eight modules, each dealing with a key international trade area (e.g., Trade Theories, E-commerce, INCOTERMS, Transportation, Insurance, Payment Systems). For each module, we created a four-column design matrix mapping (**Table 1**):

Table 1. Four-column design matrix mapping

CLIL-Content:	Specific trade knowledge and skills
CLIL-Communication:	Target language functions, genres, and discourse
CLIL-Cognition:	Intended higher-order thinking skills
CLIL-Culture/Community (Values Mapping):	Value concepts to explore (e.g., innovation, rule of law, global connectivity, cultural confidence)

Authentic news materials—articles, reports, and videos from sources like China Daily, Reuters, Bloomberg, and the Financial Times—were curated for each module to fuel this four-dimensional process.

3.3. Design validation

Pending full-scale empirical testing, preliminary validation proceeded through: (1) document analysis of syllabi and curricular guidelines to locate integration points; (2) expert consultation with two CLIL scholars and two veteran trade instructors informing matrix refinement; and (3) pilot implementation of one module, where student surveys and instructor reflective journals iteratively adjusted task parameters, scaffolding, and timing.

4. Case illustration: “International Trade Terms & Pricing” module

4.1. Module-level learning objectives (4Cs Framework)

This module is designed as a post-introductory, applied learning session for third-year English majors with foundational knowledge of INCOTERMS® 2020. Its objectives are explicitly framed within the CLIL 4Cs to ensure integrated development (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Objectives framed within the CLIL 4Cs

Content:	To apply the core divisions of risk, cost, and responsibility under key INCOTERMS® 2020 rules (FOB and CIF) to a dynamic market scenario; to perform basic cost-impact calculations using real-time data.
Communication:	To negotiate and justify the choice of a trade term (FOB or CIF) in a structured, professional briefing using English; to accurately incorporate specific data and terminology into spoken discourse.
Cognition:	To analyze a real-world market crisis, evaluate its financial impact on different contractual positions, and synthesize a strategic business recommendation based on rule-based reasoning.
Culture/Community (Values):	To internalize the principle that strict adherence to professional rules and transparent communication under adversity is a cornerstone of individual credibility and, by extension, contributes to the collective reputation of China as a reliable and cooperative commercial partner in global supply chains.

4.2. Single-article news aggregation context

This module adopts a focused “deep-dive” approach by utilizing a single, high-quality analytical news article as the sole source of authentic context. The article “Red Sea gives shipping an Uber-style price surge” serves a dual pedagogical function ^[15].

Disciplinary context: It provides the essential, quantifiable data on freight rate volatility—specifically, the surge in 40-foot container spot prices from a pre-crisis rate of “around \$1,200” to a current level of “\$4,500.” This data is the foundation for all cost-calculation and risk-assessment tasks, moving learning from abstract rules to tangible application.

Values education: The article’s narrative frames the price surge as a shared, systemic crisis affecting the entire shipping sector. This context naturally invites reflection on responsible business conduct. It raises implicit questions about how contractual partners should navigate such unforeseen, collective adversity—whether through rigid insistence on terms, or through proactive, rule-aware cooperation to preserve the business relationship. This provides the authentic substrate for discussing integrity and foresight.

4.3. Task design: Crisis response briefing simulation

Scenario: Students act as Junior Analysts at a Chinese export firm. A signed CIF contract, budgeted on a freight cost of \$1,200 per container, is under severe stress due to the Red Sea crisis. The manager demands an immediate analysis and a clear recommendation.

Pre-task: Data Extraction & Impact Calculation (8 mins)

In groups, students read the assigned article to extract the key price points (\$1,200 → \$4,500). Their first calculation is an additional cost impact on a hypothetical shipment of 10 containers: $(\$4,500 - \$1,200) \times 10 = \$33,000$.

Task process: Strategic Analysis & Briefing Preparation (12 mins)

Groups must analyze two strategic paths and prepare a one-minute English oral briefing for the “manager”:

Option A (contract-centered): Recommend upholding the CIF term, absorbing the loss, and formally notifying the client. This path strictly follows the rule “seller pays freight.”

Option B (relationship-centered): Recommend initiating transparent renegotiation with the client, using the news article as evidence, to seek a shared solution (e.g., temporary cost-sharing or a mutual agreement to switch to FOB). This path interprets the rules within the context of partnership survival.

The briefing must integrate both the specific data (“...has tripled to \$4,500, as reported by Reuters...”) and the correct INCOTERMS terminology (“...our CIF costs...,” “...if we mutually agree to switch to FOB...”).

CLIL Principle Manifestation & Debrief (10 mins)

After brief presentations, the instructor leads a targeted discussion:

Content & Cognition: “Which option demonstrates a more sophisticated understanding of the business purpose behind the INCOTERMS rules?”

Communication: “How did using the exact data from the article strengthen your professional credibility in the briefing?”

Culture/Community (Values): “Option B involves voluntary renegotiation. Does this show a lack of commitment to contracts, or a deeper form of professional integrity aimed at long-term partnership? How does this approach align with building a reputation as a ‘reliable commercial partner?’” This connects immediate action to broader professional identity and national commercial image.

4.4. Integrated assessment

Assessment is tailored to the abbreviated format (Table 3), focusing on the application of knowledge within the simulation.

Table 3. Assessment

Assessment dimension	Weight	Exemplary performance criteria
Content	30%	Correctly calculates the cost impact and accurately applies the responsibilities of CIF and FOB to the scenario.
Communication	30%	Delivers a clear, structured, and fluent briefing that incorporates key terminology and specific data from the source article.
Cognition	30%	Provides a logical, coherent rationale for the chosen strategy, demonstrating analysis of consequences beyond simple cost-bearing.
Culture/Community	10%	Shows consideration for partnership sustainability and professional trust, linking rule-compliance to reputational capital.

Note on values assessment: The Culture/Community score is not for “choosing the right moral option,” but for the quality of reasoning displayed. A well-argued case for either Option A (emphasizing unwavering reliability) or Option B (emphasizing adaptive cooperation) can score highly if it explicitly connects the choice to principles of long-term business credibility and professional integrity. This ensures the ideological dimension is assessed as integrated critical thinking, not as a separate moral judgment.

5. Discussion: Contributions and implementation pathways

This study repositions CLIL beyond language-acquisition-through-content, demonstrating how the 4Cs framework can serve as a vehicle for “content-language-values” integration required in Chinese higher education. By mapping values objectives onto the Culture dimension during instructional design, our matrix offers clear strategies that prevent the “two-skin phenomenon,” embedding values cultivation into lesson architecture rather than treating it as a superficial supplement.

The design confronts persistent demands on educator capacity in materials curation, task design, and CLIL methodology—requirements that necessitate institutional investment in sustained professional development. While our balanced focus principle and design matrix provide structural safeguards against domain marginalization, and authentic news scenarios ensure cognitive engagement through higher-order thinking, the integrated rubric’s effectiveness requires empirical validation. Future research should employ mixed-methods to rigorously measure student outcomes across all three domains, and examine transferability to other professional disciplines—such as engineering ethics or healthcare communication—to establish the model’s potential as a generalizable blueprint for integrated professional education.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how CLIL, combined with “News Aggregation,” bridges professional training and holistic education. Beyond technical competence, it cultivates ethically aware practitioners who understand that rigorous rule application and communicative integrity build personal credibility and sustainable partnerships. As higher education worldwide addresses global competence and citizenship, this model offers educators a context-sensitive pathway to prepare students who navigate marketplace complexities with professionalism and principled insight.

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