Vietnamese Students' Voices on the Strengths and Weaknesses of a Newly Formed CLIL Program in a Regional Public University

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The purpose of this study was to examine and express students' perspectives on the existing state-of-the-art CLIL implementation in a regional public university at an early stage, with the expectation of re-evaluating and exploring CLIL's strengths and threats through the eyes and perspectives of the students. This study intends to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by presenting the perspectives of 335 Vietnamese students enrolled in newly formed CLIL courses on the possibilities and risks they perceive in their learning. As the major method for collecting qualitative data, the study utilized a survey containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The results of the qualitative data analysis reveal the positive perspectives of various students regarding the strengths and opportunities of CLIL programs at the surveyed university, namely their improvement in English proficiency, language abilities, and language knowledge; an international, comfortable learning environment; and enjoyment of high-quality training programs with well-trained teaching staff, updated learning materials, and academic extracurricular activities. These results imply that learning a university topic in a non-native language is challenging but rewarding if students are able to recognize all of the benefits CLIL education offers. These findings provide an important first step toward CLIL research on the perspectives of students in developing nations where university teaching environments are not as well-equipped as in wealthy nations.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, CLIL, ELT, student perception, cross-sectional study, qualitative approach

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, education and school experiences, along with one's socio-economic and family background, are significant in establishing one's life trajectory and finding one's place in society (Lyu et al., 2019; Trines, 2017). Positive school experiences and high academic achievement are frequently predictive of success in students' later lives. As a result, it is critical to explore different educational approaches and their impacts on students' beliefs and perspectives toward schooling (Roiha, 2019).

Integrated learning of content and language is the instructional model this article focuses on. The term 'Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was initially coined in Europe in the mid-1990s due to the various changes in the European Union at the time in terms of integration, enlargement, and modernisation (Vega & Moscoso, 2019). Since CLIL emerged as a game-changer, it has been used in various ways to teach both language and subject matter simultaneously, thereby challenging the dominant conventional model of the English language classroom which was focused mainly on language. Chamot (2014, cited in Vega & Moscoso, 2019) defines a CLIL environment as one in which non-English speaking students learn a target language like English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and utilise it in an academic setting within a globalised international context (Rahimirad, 2014).

In Vietnamese universities, students study so-called 'imported' curricula, an approach which is believed to integrate students into the British or American way of scientific thinking from which the curricula have been imported. These programs are believed to help them in developing their English skills and provide them with current information, thus increasing their competitiveness in globalised labour markets. However, it is argued that there are several significant challenges associated with the process of implementing such programs, including the inefficiency of the English classes provided for Vietnamese students in such EMI programs, students' difficulties comprehending disciplinary content delivered in English, and a lack of professional development provided to prepare academics for teaching in EMI (Nguyen, 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2018).

Although CLIL is a rapidly emerging discipline, its stakeholders know little about how students experience CLIL instruction. Much has been published regarding the efficacy or inefficacy of CLIL programs from an institutional point of view, but few studies have examined students' perceptions of the CLIL programs in which they participate. This study aims to contribute to addressing this gap in the literature by reporting the opinions of 335 Vietnamese Higher Education CLIL students on the opportunities and hazards they perceive in their learning while participating in newly established CLIL courses. Therefore, this paper reviews recent research evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of EMI and CLIL education. Then we present our findings obtained from analysing open-ended survey questions in which students could voice their perceptions of their CLIL learning environment, teachers and teaching activities. The discussion of the findings includes implementation suggestions.

Literature Review

Student perceptions of the strengths and opportunities of CLIL education

CLIL has received much attention in Europe and several Asian countries in the past decade because of the rising demand for excellent command of the English language worldwide. CLIL students strongly confirm that learning English as an international language, accessing international materials, practising English, job opportunities, going abroad for work or study, and feelings of accomplishment are the opportunities offered by this teaching approach.

To begin with students' beliefs on the essential role of learning English as the target language during their learning, students perceive that English training in the CLIL program can provide them with emotions of achievement and self-confidence. Students identify and characterise the additional benefits of CLIL as personal and intellectual. The educational benefits considered by the students are those associated with the global prominence of English (Bozdoğan et al., 2021). For example, when students were asked about the benefits of CLIL and the reasons they believed it was being used, they all referred to the pressing need to improve their English proficiency. Although they argued that it is also a way to make school difficult for them, low achievers admitted that the ability to communicate in English is a valuable asset (Granel et al., 2019). Analysis of CLIL students' views on their own progress and preferred methods of instruction reveals that they place equal value on all language skills while striving to enhance their communicative competence in English (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). Students of all ages agree that their English language ability has improved as a result of the CLIL classes compared to their regular English classes. These findings corroborate Phuong and Nguyen's (2019) results. As revealed from interviews, CLIL students said their reception and production skills appear to be better developed, and that their enlarged knowledge of vocabulary and terminology greatly contribute to their learning progress. (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019).

Accessing learning resources and materials can be another significant advantage of learning in CLIL education that most CLIL students are firmly in agreement with. The students' academic advantages are based on the global prominence of English. According to student feedback, they can access more current resources, including examples and case studies. Most of the things available in their native language are translated from English, and there are few resources in their native language. It is clear from the students' statements that CLIL has a positive impact on their academic and personal lives (Bozdoğan et al., 2021). Students have consistently demonstrated a preference for topical recent materials over textbook usage (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). They prefer current-day materials over textbooks because they find them more appealing and stimulating.

Students also believe that they have more opportunities to use the English language at high levels. Many students believe that speaking a foreign language, such as English, offers advantages; therefore, it is essential to learn it at a high level. Thus, it appears that most of those polled believe that English should be made a requirement at all levels of

education, from elementary school to college. On the other hand, a large percentage of those polled disagree that speaking English has any sound effects on one's culture. Learning a new language could indicate that an external drive is at play. Students' answers to open-ended questions reinforce this idea: while they believe that English is vital for a better professional and academic future, they believe that the original language and culture must be preserved from English's detrimental effects.

Students in CLIL believe studying in the CLIL program can bring them future career prospects, personal and professional success (Granel et al., 2019). According to students' feedback, CLIL has a positive impact on their academic and personal lives. Other qualitative data suggest that students believe that training in English is beneficial for higher education, jobs, and progressive thought (Siddiqui et al., 2021).

CLIL instruction is viewed by nearly all students as a useful tool to prepare for studying and working abroad. They view complete comprehension of the course material as an indication of future success and achievement.

CLIL has obviously improved the academic and personal circumstances of the students, as evidenced by their statements (Bozdoğan et al., 2021)., The students noted that the instructor was transparent in his or her explanations and responses to the students' inquiries (Granel et al., 2019).

From the numerous studies which have been conducted on this issue, it has been shown that students underscore the fact that teachers seem to prepare lessons with more care than in regular foreign language classes and that teachers make an effort to make the material accessible to the students. As a result, students believe their language proficiency can be significantly improved.

Studies on students' perceptions of weaknesses of EMI or CLIL education

According to recent literature reviews of CLIL challenges and difficulties, CLIL students also report adverse reactions as they experience emotional distress in some circumstances, from primary teaching to tertiary educational contexts. It is impossible for them to use their target language when they are unable to comprehend the subject matter taught in that language and to improve their linguistic knowledge and communicative abilities. Consequently, students are unable to articulate themselves verbally or in writing; they are unable to provide detailed replies because of their limited language knowledge. In other words, learners face the most incredible difficulty when taking a test or an exam.

Arkin's 2013 findings show that, despite the fact that CLIL and EMI appear to be supported as a result of the perceived positive impact of English on one's professional and academic career, a significant number of responders appear to recognise the potential detrimental repercussions of EMI for discipline learning. A substantial number of respondents agree that EMI inhibits the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, a substantial percentage of students claim that they are confused about whether this learning program has a destructive or positive impact on disciplinary learning (Arkın, 2013).

Looking at the tertiary teaching level, the latest research in a Vietnamese teaching context demonstrated that CLIL students reflected their difficulties in understanding the lectures delivered in English (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). According to their perceptions of learning obstacles in CLIL, understanding new vocabulary, terms, and scientific concepts and comprehending lecture material are the most difficult tasks. Roughly half of the students who responded to the survey admitted that they had trouble grasping new vocabulary items, terminology, and scientific concepts to understand their lessons. This confirms the idea that language and listening skills may prevent students from comprehending professors' explanations and instructions and taking notes, resulting in content knowledge gaps.

Other findings of a study examining student satisfaction with content and language integrated learning in nursing education (Granel et al., 2019) show that the majority of students recognised what CLIL implementation offers them during the courses, despite the fact that a few of them experienced several challenges in their interactions and communications with their teachers within lecturers. Their feelings of English professional development, great potential to perform better in international hospitals, and the option to learn in English were highly appreciated by the study's student participants, who believed that acquiring this linguistic competency would allow them to participate in professional internationalisation. However, some reported feeling uneasy when they were required to participate and connect with the content in English. They also recognised English language acquisition as a means to improve proficiency and become more comfortable reading and comprehending international scientific literature, which they believe maintains the most outstanding scientific rigour and innovation. Yet, they found reading that literature quite challenging.

CLIL learners believe their study in CLIL, or EMI programs will require them to focus on language acquisition and content learning. Research has shown that (Arkın, 2013; Yang, 2019) students reported multi-faceted problems during their learning process in their CLIL implementation. Notably, in Asian teaching contexts where English has not been officially adopted as a second language and is not used much outside of the classroom, students with low levels of EFL proficiency recognize their language difficulties in understanding subject concepts in their textbooks and lectures. They also indicate their insufficient language skills lead to heightened levels of stress, especially when they are not supported by language tutors or are given extra time to make tests or exams (Soulioti, 2014a).

Although CLIL programs improve students' English proficiency and gradually help them gain mastery of English, students find it difficult to follow their classes since teachers do not use English during the whole class but rather a mixture of English and the native language. One study conducted in private universities in Bangladesh shows that 50% of participants said their EMI teachers did not use English during the class but that they had to complete assessments, tests, and interviews in English, which proved challenging (Murtaza, 2016). Therefore, they felt more comfortable learning new lessons in their native language than in English (Murtaza, 2016).

In Turkish teaching contexts (Bozdoğan et al., 2021), a recent study found that even when students learned the subject in their native language, they described it as mentally fatiguing, which may explain why they had such a difficult time learning it in English. They cited the inability to grasp new concepts as the most challenging obstacle. It also indicated that students are dissatisfied with science courses taught in English because they believe they would lead to failure, both in the classroom and on the university entrance exam, which is taught in the same environment. As a result, some students believe that having content classes taught in English constitutes a waste of time.

According to Shamim, Abdelhalim, and Hamid (2016), students' use of English in higher education could be a crucial issue. Learning science is challenging because teachers use English as a medium of instruction. Shamim, Abdelhalim, and Hamid's research (2016) appropriately depicts university students' communication obstacles within and outside an EMI classroom. Seventy per cent of the participants in the study explained their inability to do well on assessment tasks due to the fact that the test language was English. The form and content of their performance were not satisfactory. In fact, 87 per cent of them felt they would have performed better if they had been evaluated in their native language. Almost all (70%) were afraid and ashamed to see their professors during office hours because of the language barrier. Macaro al. (2015) noticed the same thing in his study on CLIL in higher education from students' perspectives (Macaro, 2015).

Students from Zumor's study (Al Zumor, 2019) demonstrated that they wished they were taught in their first language, Arabic, since they believed it would improve their comprehension and learning outcomes. Some students also addressed the issue of the intelligibility of teachers from particular nations who spoke English with a heavy mother-tongue accent, which can lead to difficulties in comprehension when they teach.

Still other pieces of evidence, collected in Turkish and Chinese teaching contexts, (Cankaya, 2017b) testify to students' high workload, the decrease in the quality of education and the need to consider the quality of the teaching setting. Chinese students' opinions of the difficulty of a course varied considerably (Martyn, 2018). Some students stated that they grasped the principles and needed to focus on acquiring the English language. While many students were concerned about their lack of in-depth knowledge, instructors viewed the course as merely providing a structured review of essential topics.

All in all, literature reviews of students' beliefs regarding CLIL and EMI have indicated that time investment, content learning achievements, and teacher factors (Arkın, 2013a; Soulioti, 2014b; Yang, 2014), contribute in crucial ways to students' learning success and satisfaction within and after CLIL education. However, these factors may lead to challenges and threats for students in such programs. Other challenges include low student participation and comprehension, surface learning, content rote learning, low exam scores, and a lack of student acquisition and mastery of disciplinary knowledge (Arkın, 2013).

METHOD

Research context

The present paper reports crucial findings of the first part of a longitudinal research project which focuses on investigating the state-of-the-art of CLIL and its accompanying educational issues at universities in Vietnam. The study utilized a qualitative methodology and a case study design. A case study focuses on the significance that people attach to their lives in specific settings (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). According to Bexter and Jack (2008), the case study technique equips researchers with the means to examine complicated phenomena within their settings (p. 544). Thus, the case study approach is appropriate for this research since the researchers seek to understand why and how the phenomena (i.e., positive or negative views) develops among students.

This research was carried out at a robust higher education institution located in a large southern Vietnamese city, where various CLIL programs are available for undergraduate students across a wide range of subjects. The CLIL programs at the researched university are so called 'advanced' and 'high-quality' programs. Students are allowed to enrol in these advanced learning programs when they have obtained a sufficiently high grade on the national high school exam, and on the basis of their academic performance during their three final high-school years. Additionally, students need to master the English language at the A2 level in order to be allowed to enrol.

Research questions

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the strengths and the opportunities of CLIL programs as perceived by students at a large Vietnamese public university?

2. What are the weaknesses and threats of CLIL programs as perceived by students at a large Vietnamese public university?

Research Instruments

The study employed a survey technique, with closed and open-ended questions as the primary tool for data collection. We used Qualtrics online form to obtain data from a large sample population during the COVID-19 pandemic period. However, it was relatively complex for us to receive a sufficient number of responses from the participants to whom the email consent form and research invitation were sent (Seki et al., 2018). We sent out 2060 invitation emails to students presently studying in CLIL at a public university in Vietnam's southern Mekong Delta region. The data collection period lasted one month. In the end, 335 students responded to our invitation emails.

The questionnaire contains two principal sections used to inquire about the students' (1) personal information (i.e., email, gender, age) and learning experiences, including disciplines, faculties, and years of study; (2) general appreciation of EMI or CLIL courses at the university and specific assessments of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they see. Table 1 provides some examples closed and open-ended question items used in the questionnaire.

Table 1
Descriptions and summary of questionnaire items

Items	Indicators or Questionnaire aims	Examples of closed and open-ended question items	Sections and Descriptions
1 3 6	Students' personal information (i.e., email, gender, age)	What is your student email? What is your gender? What is your year of birth?	(1)Student background
4 2 5	Students' learning experiences including disciplines, faculties, years of study	What is your faculty or college? What is your major? What is your year of study?	
7	Students' perceptions of the strengths of EMI or CLIL courses at their university	What strengths of EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?	(2)Students' evaluations or overall appreciation of EMI or CLIL courses at your university
8	Students' perceptions of the weaknesses of EMI or CLIL courses at their university	What weaknesses of EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?	
9	Students' perceptions of the opportunities of EMI or CLIL courses at their university	What opportunities following from taking EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?	
10	Students' perceptions of the threats of EMI or CLIL courses at their university	What threats following from your taking EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?	

Data collection and analysis

The online questionnaire was distributed in both English and Vietnamese, so the raw qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions were first transcribed into English if the participants replied in their native language. NVivo software was utilised to facilitate the analysis of open-ended questions' transcripts. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis tool that supports the researcher in the organisation and management of textual materials. The collected qualitative data of student answers to the open-ended questions was transcribed properly and imported into NVivo as a separate excel file for each single research question. The literature review and research questions provided inspiration for the coding structure and direction for the data analysis.

The collected qualitative data from student answers were subjected to content analysis (Cohen et al., 2011), which focuses on the meaning of texts. Grounded theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006), an inductive technique that allows for the emergence of categories rather than strictly establishing them beforehand, was regarded to be the most appropriate method for data analysis.

Firstly, NVivo software was used for auto-coding the primary data. The results of the auto-coding theme were initially read to look for a common theme and the same or reoccurrence of words from the auto-coding results (i.e., opportunities, future career, language proficiency, difficulties or challenges, lecturers, teaching activities and methods, learning environments, extracurricular activities, learning process). Next, the participants' responses and the transcribed data were re-read for similarities and differences to develop themes and categories for coding later (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). As an example, Figure 1 depicts one of the discovered major themes and its accompanying subthemes. When the step of identifying common themes and content was completed, NVivo software was used to code the data manually. This methodology

for data analysis can allow closeness to the data, and the coded form of the text can be statistically analysed (Kawulich, 2004). Based on qualitative content and theme analysis, the study is expected to show the frequency and evaluation patterns with which the respondents share an idea.
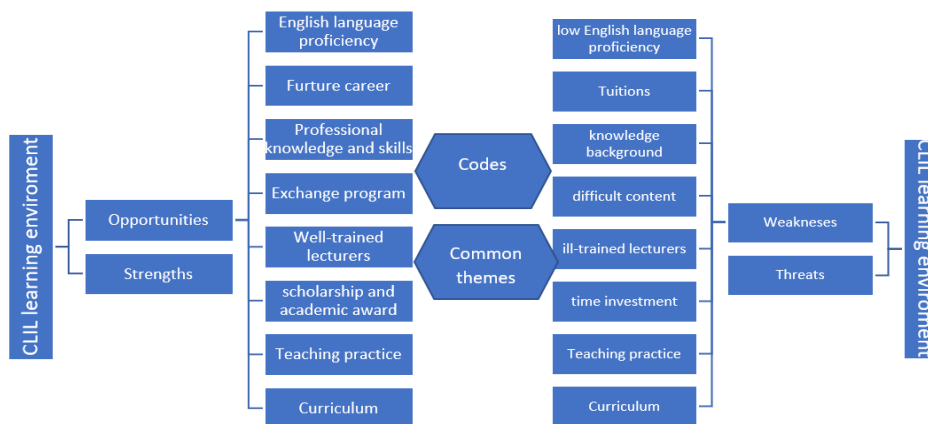

Figure 1
Themes and codes of SWOT of CLIL education

FINDINGS

The strengths and the opportunities of CLIL programs as perceived by students at a public university

Qualitative data analysis results provide different students' positive viewpoints of the strengths and opportunities of CLIL programs at the surveyed university, namely their improvement in English proficiency, language abilities, and language knowledge; an international, comfortable learning environment; and enjoyment of high-quality training programs with well-trained teaching staff, updated learning materials, and academic extra-curriculum activities.

Table 2
Summary of student views on CLIL strengths and opportunities

Student views on CLIL strengths and opportunities	Number of responses
Improvement in English Proficiency and knowledge of EFL learning	184
Modern and Dynamic Learning Environment	253
High-quality training program for their future career	59
Well-trained and qualified teaching staff	110
Better learning materials and resources	59
Activities or courses to support students' academic performance	27
- English preparatory courses	26
- extra-curricular classes for 21st-century skills	14
- Exchanged learning program at a foreign university	39
Scholarships	19
Improvement in applicable skills	52
Improvement in subject-specific and professional knowledge	74

Regarding students' beliefs on enhancing English proficiency, language abilities, and language knowledge, 184 students agree that their English language fluency, language skills, and the ability to acquire a new language have all improved by taking CLIL classes.

"The subjects are taught in English, thus improving the ability to read documents in English and quickly update new specialised knowledge from online documents..." Student 1

"*I can study in a classroom with modern equipment, and these training courses taught by qualified instructors help students have more opportunities to improve their English skills.*" Student 2

"*I am well trained in English communication skills and can communicate with friends and teachers in English*" Students 3 and 5

"*My English skills have improved because I have to read, learn and interact with English learning material.*" Students 6 and 4

"*I can master specialised vocabulary in English and improve speaking and writing skills.*" Student 10

"*In this teaching program, I can learn more English and interact with teachers and classmates in English during the learning process.*" Student 7

"*These courses help students have more opportunities to improve their English skills and study in a highly internationalised environment."* Student 8

Many (253 students) agree they can study in an excellent learning environment in which they study with good and modern equipment and facilities and with well-trained and qualified lecturers or foreign lecturers and experts. Few recognise that they can use up-to-date learning materials and new cutting-edge teaching activities. Students appreciate activities or courses to support their academic performance. For example, they can receive priority for studying in English preparatory courses each semester (26 students) and participate in exchange learning programs at a foreign university (39 students).

"*…I can study with good teachers and modern facilities..."* Student 9

"*This program help students – like me improve English significantly, such as listening and speaking skills because I access foreign textbooks. Then I have a chance to study abroad.*" Student 10

"*Each semester, taking an English preparatory class is my privilege in the CLIL program. I have several advantages of studying in advanced English classes than other mass training programs."* Student 11

"I can learn skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing in-depth while being guided and having access to European standard documents and lecturers at the top of language departments with foreign lecturers." Student 289

According to CLIL students, they have excellent opportunities for their future careers and professions in both multinational and domestic and foreign companies thanks to

their excellent English language background. Most student answers focus on openings for working and studying in English-speaking environments, as they receive much attention from recruitment staff and maximise their chances of obtaining scholarships from foreign universities.

"I can work at a foreign company after graduating, and it will be easy to apply for a job at any multinational corporation or company." Student 43

"I can improve my foreign language skills, which can help me work at foreign companies better." Student 44

"There are many opportunities for me to work in an international company." Student 45

"I will receive better job opportunities, especially for international companies." Student 46

"I will have opportunities to find high-paid jobs that maximise my potentials and learn many advanced things when there are many opportunities to work at multinational companies." Student 47

Students suppose that improving communication skills and obtaining extra-paid income are the results of their getting used to studying and working in international, open, and modern environments.

"I can practice basic skills, improve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and be able to confidently communicate with foreigners as well as meet jobs that require English." Student 48

"I will have chances to improve my communication skills and presentation in English." Student 49

"I will have a better problem-solving, argument, and criticism skills from my team working (including in English)." Student 50

Being awarded a scholarship is also a significant opportunity that CLIL and EMI students suggest as a possible outcome of their studying in a CLIL course. They think these learning programs can offer them more opportunities to study abroad or take exchange courses in foreign universities thanks to their better English language proficiency than other ordinary learning programs at the same university.

"I am easy to apply for a scholarship to study abroad (here, I mean that the GPA must be high) because there have been about 4-4.5 years of study in a regular English-speaking environment." Student 51

"After participating in the advanced program, EMI students will have a high chance of receiving scholarships to study abroad and have gained a steppingstone in advance." Student 52

Concerning students' perceptions of high occasions in English-speaking working and studying contexts, they believe their English language skills can affect their employment probability and quality of jobs since they will have good prospects to integrate and adapt

their learning styles to communicate and understand cultures in international working environments.

"Expanding job opportunities at companies both in Vietnam and abroad." Student 53

"There are diverse jobs and high promotion opportunities." "Because of good English language skills, there will be more additional job opportunities, more diverse working positions." Student 54

"Accessing to good learning materials from abroad." Student 55

"Contacting with foreign lecturers.." "..acquiring in-depth knowledge which I cannot learn from Vietnamese learning materials." Student 56

"There are not many students in the class so it is easy to interact with lecturers, learn with some foreign lecturers." Student 57

"...studying with foreign lecturers and thanks to good foreign language skills, you can find a better job" Student 58

"...meeting and exchanging with foreign lecturers and international students" Student 59

The weaknesses of CLIL programs as perceived by students

Table 3 summarises the results of the qualitative data analysis of students' perspectives on the weaknesses of the current CLIL implementation at their university. In general, students identify insufficient English skills for lecture understanding, and teaching staff deficiencies. Most participants refer to financial hardship due to high tuition fees, and concerns about subject-specific knowledge loss. A few students also mention difficulties enhancing their communication skills and in-class instructor interactions.

Table 3

Summary of students' views on weaknesses and threats of CLIL program

Students' views on CLIL weaknesses and threats	Number of responses
English language Proficiency	37
English language proficiency of Lecturers	7
Complex disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills	18
Difficult learning materials	4
Stressful learning program	12
Hard work	11
Fixed and unchangeable learning schedule	21
Extra effort for EFL learning	17
Incapable and unwell-trained teaching staff due to the newly implemented learning program	11
Lack of interaction	8
Inappropriate teaching	7
Expensive tuition	64

Regarding student perspectives on CLIL weaknesses, students believe their unsatisfactory English language proficiency and teachers' English knowledge are the primary disadvantages of the current programs, which affects their learning.

Due to language insufficiency, 37 students claimed they faced many difficulties understanding lectures, and seventeen acknowledged they had to spend extra time improving their language skills.

"Due to my inadequate English proficiency, sometimes I cannot keep up with what lecturers teach in their lectures and new knowledge of lessons." Student 12

"Our English proficiency has been low and weak, so we have difficulty comprehending new knowledge of learning lessons' from these courses." Student 13

"It costs more time to graduate than other ordinary learning programs. Learning in English also has many disadvantages. It costs more, and it takes me a longer time to graduate from this program than other programs." Student 14

According to the participants' responses, it is challenging for CLIL students (18 students) to acquire and grasp specific subject knowledge and develop their professional skills due to language gaps and intricate knowledge from their courses. Learning becomes more problematic since their learning materials are in English, and several textbooks are not updated and too complicated to comprehend.

"At the beginning, it was also a bit detrimental in terms of language, and specialised terms were complicated to find and understand." Student 15

"Because using English is the most common in a few lessons, some students who are not good at English will have obstacles in the process of understanding lectures." Student 16

"Our English proficiency has been low and weak, so we have difficulty comprehending new knowledge of learning programs. One example is that insufficient programming skills cause us to rely on samples of documents and solutions for programming" Student 17

"I do not understand the meaning of the word, and because I am not good at English, it is hard to grasp the knowledge of the lecture." Student 18

Students find their communication and language ability are not very good because learning in these programs becomes demanding (12 students), brings along stress (12 students), also because of lack of clarifying interaction between students and lecturers (11), Moreover, 15 students complain that they cannot modify and adjust their plans and learning schedule because there are no options for them to complete their learning trajectory early.

"Some lecturers mistakenly believe that students studying EMI are deeply knowledgeable. So their lectures are often quickly or too advanced, which causes some students to have difficulty and slow understanding. These students cannot keep up with the lesson pace. I think self-learning skills are still strongly recommended." Student 19

"The program with too much knowledge and a high number of continuous deadlines, it is inevitable cause me to be fatigued and stressed in the learning process. It requires me to have high self-study ability, and sometimes lecturers assign new assignments without lecturing about it once." Student 20

"The program is foreign-oriented, so there are some difficulties for Vietnamese students who want to study it due to high foreign language proficiency requirements." Student 21

"Students are not allowed to arrange their individual study program (ISP) according to personal needs a longer study time. All the subjects are taught in English, which sometimes makes me difficult to understand the lessons." Student 22

"The curriculum is time-consuming, and tuition fees are quite high. Students' learning plans cannot be flexible study subjects together. Subjects are only taught once a year. This means students who fail the subject cannot study again in the next semester and must wait until next year." Student 23

According to students' beliefs, a smaller class means that students (8 students) have fewer opportunities to socialise with their peers from other departments, which is generally thought of as something interesting.

"There are fewer opportunities to interact with other classmates from different departments due to studying a size-fixed class with fewer students." Student 24

"The number of students is too small, difficult is a grouping and exchange in the learning process. Some faculty misrepresent students of high-quality programs" Student 25

"There is only contact with students studying the same discipline; there are few opportunities to communicate with students from other programs. Students usually study in a fixed environment in the faculties." Student 26

Students have the impression that this program is not as valuable as they had expected after hearing about it in an introduction and university advertisements, and they are concerned about the level of instruction provided by the university and the quality of the lectures given by the professors.

"Tuition fees are too expensive compared to quality. The training program is not intensive and ensures the quality of output for students. The programs were launched with the content being taught entirely in English. In fact, it is bilingual teaching (both Vietnamese and English). It is necessary to adjust the training program to 70% English and 30% Vietnamese so students can understand the lesson better and more appropriately." Student 8

"When I began studying at the school, lecturers did not teach English from easy to advanced, but they only taught lessons at advanced levels." Student 27

"According to my observations, students may have low entry points to study in high-quality programs, so the quality is not guaranteed." Student 28

A limited number of students report that the university's current teaching staff and learning resources are insufficient to provide adequate training. They feel that some courses at the university are not as well-designed or taught as the mass education or standard training programs. They criticise that although the vast majority of teachers hold advanced degrees, they are frequently rather busy, which means that their teaching

does not fit into the allotted time for lessons. Sometimes, highly competent students are too busy to devote much time to class. They believe there was a shortage of teachers and teachers lack sufficient training.

"Students studying in a high-quality program easily have a habit that usually relies on their instructors' instructions." Student 29

"Currently, the school's teaching staff and learning resources are insufficient to develop a high-quality program." Student 30

"Some courses are not as well-designed and effectively taught as the faculty's mass educational or ordinary training program." Student 31

"Most teachers are highly qualified, so sometimes they are quite busy, so the lessons may not meet the allowed time." Student 32

"students are sometimes too busy and don't have much time for class." Student 33

"Lack of teachers. There are some teachers who are not very sufficiently well-trained." Student 34

"Teaching staff need to have sufficient ability to impart knowledge." Student 35

"Currently, the school's teaching staff and learning resources are inadequate to develop a high-quality program." Student 36

"Many specialised English words are new, and the teaching staff is uneven in English level as well as teaching methods are contradictory." Student 37

Surprisingly, many students (64 students) reflect that the most noticeable drawback of CLIL programs at the university is the expensive tuition fee and complex knowledge. They say the current tuition fee they have to pay is too high and expensive to compare with other mass educational programs at the same university, which causes them financial stress and more learning pressure.

"Because of studying specific subjects in English, students cannot fully grasp the content of some specialised subjects. In some courses, lecturers only teach basic knowledge of subjects, but in final exams, they evaluate students' advanced knowledge. Some subjects' questions and contents of final exams are too long and heavy compared to their time allocation. Heavy curriculum, students have to make lots of presentations in many subjects, do group assignments, conduct a scientific project for their thesis, and pay high tuition fees." Student 38

"Because it is a high-quality studying program, studying in this program is harder and more stressful." Student 39

"The program is foreign-oriented, so there are some difficulties for Vietnamese students who want to study such as high foreign language proficiency requirements, expensive tuition fees, requiring students to be highly self-conscious." Student 40

"The cost of studying in these programs is higher than other normal learning programs." Student 43

"Tuition fees of this program are quite high compared to other Vietnamese educational programs at university." Student 42

Many students are scared that they will not be able to pay expensive tuition fees in the future.

"I will be unable to pay tuition fees." Student 60

"I may fail some EMI courses and will be unable to pay tuition fees due to high cost.." Student 61

"You may have difficulty with tuition fees." Student 62

"I do not have enough money to pay tuition fees." Student 63

Some students fear losing their fundamental knowledge due to their low English language proficiency. The results of students' failure to acquire basic knowledge could lead to their learning boredom and dropping out of school. The possible severe consequence of the students' insufficient understanding of subjects is a high unemployable rate after graduation.

"I would have poor background knowledge if I do not understand the teacher's lecture because the lesson is taught in English. " Student 64

"I do not understand and remember specialised knowledge in English and advanced knowledge. If students cannot understand their lessons, there may be a knowledge failure." Student 65

"The risk of knowledge failure is much because you do not know the meaning of specialised English words leading to not understanding the article." Student 66

"Sometimes students who are good at English but are not familiar with how to communicate in English will be often passive in courses." Student 67

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to explore and present students' voices regarding the actual state-of-the-art of CLIL implementation in a public regional university in Vietnam with a view to exploring its quality, advantages and drawbacks as seen by the students. The following section will discuss how Vietnamese students at the public university perceive their learning environment, their lecturers and their learning activities.

Most student responses focus on opportunities to work and study in foreign or English-speaking areas. Thanks to their proficiency in the English language, they perceive excellent chances for future careers and professions in multinational and local and international corporations. This could be explained by the fact that if they can adequately speak and use professional English they are easily absorbed into the international workplace. Similar results were obtained in many recent studies on CLIL and EMI educators (Vo, 2017; Granel et al., 2019; Phuong & Nguyen, 2019;,). Similarly, examining the strengths of CLIL, nearly all students report that their English ability, language skills, and knowledge have increased. The results corroborate Arkin's findings (2013), which stated that mastering English is essential for understanding

lectures and updated learning materials (Arkın, 2013). However, the present study's findings are not in line with those of Filice (2021), who found that students felt CLIL lessons are seen as more complicated, less critical, and unnecessary for the student's daily lives and less helpful than EFL lessons. Nevertheless, the current results are in line with Filice (2021) that students regard CLIL lessons as more inspiring but more complex and hence more thought-provoking and demanding than regular English classes.

The findings gathered from the study concerning the weaknesses and drawbacks of CLIL education regard the possibility of negative impacts on their subject learning outcomes, and instructors' teaching characteristics (Arkın, 2013; Soulioti, 2014a; Yang, 2014). Prior studies in similar teaching contexts also show that CLIL students feel burdened when they need to understand the fundamentals and also concentrate on learning the English language. Instructors on the other hand, consider the course as merely a systematic review of important topics, despite the concerns of many students (Cankaya, 2017a). This may cause students to be overwhelmed and stressed in their CLIL training as students' responses indicate they are scared of losing their fundamental knowledge due to their low English language proficiency.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has proven students' positive perspectives on their CLIL university education. Students testify to seeing advantages for their future professions in studying and working in international-speaking environments. They believe in the strengths of the learning programs as regards the development of their English proficiency, learning and professional skills, and their specific disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, this study contributes to further filling the gap in the literature on students' voices in CLIL university learning programs. What students report positively is the result of dedicated teaching staff that supports the development of students' English and subject-specific skills. Being at an earlier stage in its development, the program shows some weaknesses that need to be taken account of.

Taken together, these findings suggest that learning a university subject in a non-native language is demanding but worthy for students if they can perceive all of the advantages CLIL education provides. These results provide a significant first step toward CLIL research on students' views in developing countries where university teaching conditions may not yet be ideally fit to provide high quality CLIL teaching at the tertiary level of education.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire About Students' Perceptions of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) And Content and English Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Courses at a Public University in Vietnam

Thank you for your willingness to participate in our investigation!

This questionnaire inquiries into your experiences of studying in English-medium instruction (CLIL-English) courses at your university. We hope to receive your reactions and feedback on specialized subjects taught in English. Your answers will help the university determine what support students need and how this type of teaching can best be approached.

This questionnaire is anonymous and confidential. The obtained information will be used only for research purposes. Your responses will NOT be passed on to your instructors.

Thank you very much for your collaboration.

SECTION 1: STUDENT BACKGROUND

1. What is your student email?	
2. What is your major?	
3. What is your gender?	Male ☐ Female ☐
4. What is your faculty or college?	
5. What is your year of study?	
6. What is your year of birth?	

SECTION 2: YOUR OVERALL APPRECIATION OF EMI OR CLIL COURSES AT YOUR UNIVERSITY

Please write down in a bulleted list what your experiences have been with CLIL education at your university. You may write about your current year of study, but also about previous years of study at your university. You may think of obstacles and difficulties you have encountered, but also about the benefits of your studying English-medium courses.

Be as complete as possible.

7.What strengths of EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?

8. What weaknesses of EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?

9. What opportunities following from taking EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?

10. What threats following from my taking EMI or CLIL courses have you perceived from your university?