

## Chapter 2

# Mentoring Bilingual Teachers in Content and Language– Integrated Learning Programs Through the SIOP

**Patricia Barcena-Toyos**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2942-1768>

*Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Spain*

### ABSTRACT

*The chapter examines the perceptions of novice bilingual teachers about the potential use of the SIOP as a mentoring tool that can assist them in the attention to language and the integration of academic language in their lessons. The participants (n=32) were in-service teachers enrolled in a master's program on bilingual education in an online university in Spain, with little to no experience teaching in bilingual programs. Answers to a Likert-scale questionnaire showed that participants' perceptions on mentoring programs for novice teachers in bilingual settings were overall positive. Comparisons between groups did not show any differences, which led to the conclusion that despite their previous teaching experience and their training on the CLIL approach, novice teachers still feel the need of guidance in their first encounters with teaching content and language integrated, and that the SIOP can act as an effective mentoring tool where mentoring programs are not in place.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Content-based education programs have exponentially grown in the last decades, particularly in Europe, where these programs have coined the label ‘bilingual’ to refer to bilingual education in majority languages, where two majority languages are used to teach curricular content in mainstream education (Baker & Wright, 2017) to meet the needs of the ever-changing and multilingual societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Considering the plurilingual nature of the European Union and the linguistic richness and diversity of its countries and citizens, bilingual education there means that students learn some content in their first language and some content in an additional language, through the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach (henceforth, CLIL). In fact, Baker & Wright (2017) underline the similarities between CLIL and content-based instruction in the United States “in that the focus is on learning a new language through the medium of content area instruction in that language” (p. 235). In Spain, bilingual programs are envisioned as the answer to the low levels of proficiency in a foreign language —commonly, English (from now on, EFL)— that most individuals still had after years of EFL learning. However, the rapid growth of these programs in the country outpaced teacher provision (Dalton-Puffer et al, 2022) and only recently did teacher training began to consolidate. Teacher training for educators in content-based or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) programs, for the most part, is voluntary and at a postgraduate level. In fact, in many countries in Europe —including Spain, there are no requirements for bilingual teachers to be trained in any content-based teaching approaches. This lack of training has been identified as a common issue of bilingual teachers across countries where a CLIL approach is implemented (e.g. Bárcena-Toyos, 2023; Pérez-Cañado, 2018).

The competencies of CLIL teachers are different from those required for mainstream teachers (Custodio-Espinar & García-Ramos, 2020; Morton & Nashaat-Sobhy, 2023), because they have to teach subject-specific content and EFL integrated, with attention to the academic language required for learners to reach the content learning objectives and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the subject area. Since the linguistic demands of the content determine the type of language needed to achieve the learning objectives, the implications of language that learners are exposed to in the content classroom lay in the need to learn academic language —both general and specific to the subject area, what is known as language for and language of learning, respectively in CLIL (Coyle et al, 2010)— and to level up the lack of parity between learners’ cognitive and FL levels (Lo & Fung, 2020). The integration of content and language has, of course, implications for teachers, who have to adapt their pedagogies to accommodate the particular needs of this group of students, and who also need to deal with their own linguistic challenges

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