

# Possibilities of using integrated learning in teaching English in a non-linguistic college

## Posibilidades de utilizar el aprendizaje integrado en la enseñanza del inglés en una universidad no lingüística

Irma Igorevna MOLCHANOVA <sup>1</sup>; Alena Yuryevna NIKITINA <sup>2</sup>; Yury Anatoljevich ERMOSHIN <sup>3</sup>; Natalia Vladimirovna ALONTSEVA <sup>4</sup>; Tatiana Sergeevna RUZHENTSEVA <sup>5</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT:

In the current conditions, apart from high-quality professional education, a crucial component of a specialist's competitiveness is the knowledge of a foreign language (further on – FL). Because of this, during the training of higher educational institutions' students, learning a FL requires considering professional specifics and its orientation on actualizing the professional activity tasks. Hence, methods of teaching a FL as a science are faced with the aim of searching for the optimal ways of reaching a sufficient level of FL knowledge for professional goals. Therefore, the aim of present article is to discuss the specifics of various methods of teaching a FL for professional communication and the possibilities of using them in a non-linguistic college. In the context of present study, integrated learning is defined as learning, in which the focus is shifted from isolated teaching of a FL for professional communication to integration of learning the language with studying special disciplines. Analysis of theoretical developments and conduction of an experimental study showed that teaching a FL for professional communication on the basis of the CLIL methodology is efficient for students of a non-linguistic college.

**Keywords:** content-based instruction, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), foreign-language immersion, traditional professionally-oriented learning, the ESP method.

#### RESUMEN:

En las condiciones actuales, aparte de la educación profesional de alta calidad, un componente crucial de la competitividad de un especialista es el conocimiento de una lengua extranjera (LE). Por ello, durante la formación de los estudiantes de las instituciones de enseñanza superior, el aprendizaje de una LE requiere considerar las especificidades profesionales y su orientación en la realización de las tareas de la actividad profesional. Por lo tanto, los métodos de enseñanza de una LE como una ciencia se enfrentan con el objetivo de buscar las formas óptimas de alcanzar un nivel suficiente de conocimientos de FL para los objetivos profesionales. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es discutir los detalles de varios métodos de enseñanza de una LE para la comunicación profesional y las posibilidades de utilizarlos en un colegio no lingüístico. En el contexto del presente estudio, el aprendizaje integrado se define como aprendizaje, en el que el enfoque se traslada de la enseñanza aislada de una LE para la comunicación profesional a la integración de aprender el idioma con el estudio de disciplinas especiales. El análisis de los desarrollos teóricos y la conducción de un estudio experimental demostró que la enseñanza de un LE para la comunicación profesional sobre la base de la metodología CLIL es eficiente para los estudiantes de un colegio no lingüístico. Palabras clave: enseñanza basada en contenido, aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas (CLIL), inmersión en lenguas extranjeras, aprendizaje tradicional orientado profesionalmente, el método ESP.

## 1. Introduction

Content-based second language instruction, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and foreign-language immersion are the leading and the most efficient directions of optimizing and intensifying students' foreign language learning for professional goals. They are widely used in the universities of the developed countries worldwide. Unfortunately, teachers FL for professional communication in the national non-linguistic higher school are not familiar enough with the essence of these three related approaches, which prevents their efficient introduction.

Such discussion should begin with content-based second language instruction, because it is the most suitable approach for teaching a foreign language in non-linguistic colleges.

One of the first studies of learning a language and communication in it with regard to the content of other study disciplines was a monograph by D.M. Brinton, M.A. Snow and M.B. Wesche (Brinton, et. al. 1989). The authors define such learning by understanding this terminological collocation as a combination of certain content of disciplines with the aims of FL learning. This method of FL learning provides simultaneous acquisition of knowledge on a certain (non-linguistic) discipline and speaking skills and abilities related to the studied language and communication in it. The program of FL learning is tightly linked, or is even directly based, on the program of learning a certain (non-linguistic) discipline; therefore, the sequence of acquiring the language/speech content corresponds to the demands of the successive learning of the non-linguistic discipline's content. Students' (and partially teacher's) attention is focused on acquiring the extra-linguistic information of a certain (non-linguistic) discipline by a FL. Development of purely speaking skills and abilities occurs as a by-product of this process in general. Therefore, in the majority of specialized educational institutions, "learning through content" eliminates the gap between learning a language and learning special (e.g., professional) disciplines, which require learning the language for the communication in their field.

FL learning based on the content of special disciplines should not be confused with professionally-oriented learning, which is well-known by the national FL teachers in non-linguistic colleges. If the students read texts on their specialty in a foreign language, and the reading is followed by exercises about lexical and grammar material from the read text, as it often happens in the textbooks for learning a FL for professional goals, it is professionally-oriented learning, but not the content-based learning. Content-based learning includes only such types of activity that are specific only for the professional content, which has to be taught by using a FL. Such professionally-oriented types of educational activity model the professional activity to some extent, instead of just being based on its content. This includes students' brainstorming and discussions about professional questions, discussion of cases, students' presentations of the professional nature, project work and other types of educational activity, which are performed on the studied language, rather than on the native one.

One concept close to the concept of learning a language on the basis of the content of special disciplines is content and language integrated learning (CLIL). The difference consists only in the fact that CLIL is defined as a wider concept.

The term CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) was introduced in 1994 by David Marsh, a researcher in the field of multi-language education, in order to name the method of teaching and learning general-education subjects (or their separate parts) in a FL. 9 (Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe)

The following definition of CLIL is currently the most common one in the national applied linguistics: it is a didactical method, which allows developing students' foreign-language linguistic and communicative competence in the same educational context, in which their basic knowledge and skills development occurs (Kochenkova 2012).

According to D. Coyle (Coyle 2007), CLIL is such FL learning, which is used as a tool for teaching and students' acquisition of the content. CLIL consists of a system of various methods of practical actualization of learning through the content of other disciplines. These are not only the approaches that result from the abovementioned concept of content-based second language instruction, because the CLIL method is aimed not only, and not primarily, on higher education, but also on the secondary education, which certainly requires specific methodic solutions. As a result, CLIL includes content-based learning in the described sense, as well as other modifications. Therefore, CLIL can be addressed as a class concept with respect to the type concept of teaching a language on the basis of the specialty content. Both CLIL and specialty content-based language instruction can be united under the concept of integrated learning, because, in both cases, there is an integration of language and content.

There are three models of CLIL: soft (language-led), hard (subject-led) and partial immersion. The first model is aimed at linguistic specifics of the special content, the second model means that 50% of the study plan of the specialty subjects is studied in a FL, and the third has an intermediate position and is used when some modules of the specialty programs are studied in a FL (Krashennikova 2013).

Based on Eastern-European practical experience of introducing CLIL, D. Coyle (2007) lists the following general advantages of this approach, independently from its specific modifications (including such modification described above, as content-based second language instruction):

- Increase of students' linguistic competence and their confidence in their linguistic and speaking capabilities.
- Increase of expectations regarding the efficiency and productivity of learning, both from the sides of teachers and students.
- Development of students' abilities to make decision in risky situations, as well as abilities to solve problems.
- Better development of students' foreign-language lexical and grammar skills.
- Motivation and reward of students for developing their autonomy and even independence in the educational process.
- Students' transition from studying artificial topics common for FL lessons to the real and practically significant topics.
- Increase of the native language knowledge, primarily, of the literacy.
- Increase of the speech spontaneity level in communication due to the fact that the language is used as a tool, and not as the aim of learning.
- Development students' abilities to study and focus of the learning, because mastering the abilities to learn, using a FL as a learning tool, is one of the basic requirements towards CLIL.
- Development of study motivation and positive attitude towards the educational process.
- Possibility to integrate the development of inter-cultural communication skills in the study program.

All these advantages of CLIL (and the advantages of content-based learning in the abovementioned sense, as one of the CLIL modifications) resulted in the fact that professional literature began presenting opinions about the futility of continuing teaching a FL for professional goals in a traditional way, when the language *per se* (its professional component) and communication in it, instead of professional content, are in center of teacher's and student's attention (as, for example, in the ESP method, i.e. in the method of English language teaching for professional goals (Robinson 1991)). H. Bicknell (2009) places a reasonable question about the utility of teaching business English in a traditional way, in case when teaching with the CLIL method *a priori* leads to better results. Obviously, not everyone agrees with such conclusion (McBeath 2009), but hardly anyone would disagree with the fact that in the conditions of CLIL's successes it is at least inevitable to raise this question.

As far as the raised question is concerned, probably, both sides of this discussion are right. The proportion between, for example, ESP (in teaching English for professional goals) and CLIL depends on the conditions and aims of learning. For example, if business FL is studied by practicing businessmen or economists, i.e. the developed specialists with experience in their field, it is unlikely that they need CLIL (and learning through content in the abovementioned sense, as a narrower CLIL modification). These people are focused on learning specifically the language for business communication, and not on mastering the content, which they are very familiar with. Therefore, it would be more rational in this case to organize the educational process by a more traditional and conventional method of language learning (professionally-oriented learning). But if we are talking about teaching the students of non-linguistic colleges, i.e. the people, who are not sufficiently informed yet in their prospective profession, integration of the professional disciplines' content with the aims of learning a FL would be suitable, because in this case all CLIL advantages (or advantages of "content-based learning"), which were described above, would manifest vividly. Therefore, upon further development of CLIL, it would probably "push out" more and more the traditional professionally-oriented method of FL learning in non-linguistic colleges.

All of the abovementioned facts about the proportion of CLIL and FL learning through the content of professional disciplines allows making the following conclusions:

- CLIL and FL learning based on the professional disciplines content are the varieties of the same integrated learning method. The only difference is that CLIL is a wider concept and includes various modifications of this method for different conditions and aims of education.
- CLIL has multiple practically proven advantages over the traditional professionally-oriented FL learning (in case of English learning, ESP). These advantages provide the increase of quality, efficiency and productivity of language learning for professional communication in a non-linguistic higher educational institution.
- Due to such advantages, it is reasonable to conduct a gradual transition of educational process from professionally-oriented FL learning for professional goals in non-linguistic colleges to the method of FL learning and communication in it through the content of special disciplines.

However, complete rejection of the traditional professionally-oriented learning would have been rather unreasonable. For example, traditional professionally-oriented FL learning can be useful during the first years of non-linguistic colleges, when both linguistic and professional education of students still makes it rather hard for them to learn the language through the special disciplines content. In case if CLIL is integrated on the foreign language lessons only from the 2nd year, on the basis of the preliminary preparation through professionally-oriented learning on the 1st year, it will be easier for the students to overcome linguistic and content difficulties.

In turn, FL learning by the CLIL method on the 2nd year creates opportunities for integrating *foreign-language immersion* in the teaching of these professional disciplines during the senior years of non-linguistic colleges.

FL learning through immersion has become a rather commonly used practice in many developed countries worldwide after the success of the programs of so-called "Canadian immersion" (French immersion: Process, product and perspectives, 1994) in the 60-70s of the past century. Any program of FL learning through immersion is based on teaching one of several university-cycle disciplines not in students' native language but in that FL, which they are learning (Clark 2000). Programs of foreign-language immersion for higher educational institutions define such immersion as a specific type of integrated (with studying special disciplines) FL learning, the aim of which is for student to master the language for professional communication (Walker and Tedick 2000). Thus, immersion, like FL teaching based on the special disciplines content, is a type of integrated learning. Therefore, if both content-based learning and foreign-language immersion are introduced in non-linguistic colleges, it is reasonable to speak about introducing integrated learning *per se*, thus uniting both types by a single wider-sense concept.

The main difference between the two abovementioned types of integrated learning consists in the fact that content-based learning is mostly conducted on the FL lessons, while it is possible to talk about foreign-language immersion only when a specific professional discipline course is presented in a FL.

Such foreign-language immersion can be of three types. Its highest type is total immersion (Holobow, et. al. 1983). Total foreign-language immersion contains the typical academic lessons in special disciplines, with the only difference being that they are conducted not in students' native language but in the FL without any "concessions", considering students' level of language knowledge. This means that the students, who study special disciplines by the method of total foreign-language immersion, have to be at a high level of FL proficiency (at least on B2 level, is not C1, according to the general European system of language proficiency level). Moreover, such high level of language competence has to concern not only, and not primarily, generally-used language, but also specifically the sub-language for professional communication. Therefore, total foreign-language immersion is the highest level of FL education for prospective specialists' professional communication.

However, it is impossible to integrate total English-language immersion in non-linguistic colleges, right after the conventional English language course for professional goals based on professionally-oriented method. Students' language education, obtained during the college English language course, is simply insufficient for that. It does not mean that in this case it is completely impossible to introduce total English-language immersion. However, students still need to be prepared for it for a rather long time.

The sequence of such preparation requires that, after the standard professionally-oriented English language teaching in the 1st year and learning based on the special disciplines content in the 2nd year, first sheltered/standard immersion is introduced in the 3rd year, and then partial immersion is added in the 4th. Standard and partial immersion are second and the third types of immersion, which can be conducted at the lessons in special disciplines.

Partial immersion (Burger, et. al. 1997) is conducted only at the lessons in special disciplines; it implies temporary combination of the foreign and native

languages (e.g., lectures can be taught in the native language) during the initial stage with gradual “pushing out” of the native language and its replacement by the foreign one.

Sheltered/standard immersion (Cummins 2001) is the simplest type of immersion. It is also based on the combination of native and foreign languages in the teaching process, but this combination of the two languages is not temporary, but rather constant during the whole standard immersion course. This type of immersion is considered as a preparation stage for the further introduction of partial, and then total immersion on its basis.

## 2. Methods

FL learning for professional communication is a rather prolonged process, and, consequently, is characterized by its own development dynamics. We based the development of educational tasks on the idea that the development of foreign-language competence (FC) for professional communication has to be conducted in the process of gradual organization of subject-language integrated FL learning. Content of FL learning has to correspond with the content of the educational program of the special professional discipline.

Educational tasks were divided into the following segments:

Segment 1. Introductory discussion on the selected professional topic (in English). Students, together with the teacher, name the basic concepts that they know, discuss them, etc. The teacher introduces the new vocabulary on the selected topic. The conducted oral survey showed that, previously, students have not learned this content in their native language. This segment also included listening exercises, during which the students were suggested to listen to a podcast/to watch a fragment of a video and to do a couple of educational tasks.

Segment 2. Reading and oral translation of a professional text with further conduction of exercises, aimed at evaluating its perception and comprehension, and analysis of previously unfamiliar lexical units. As a homework, students had to prepare a brief reproduction of the material presented in the studied text.

Segment 3. Independent creation of presentations on the studied lexical material.

Participants in the study were 100 2nd- and 3rd-year students; experimental group (EG) included 40 people, control group (CG) – 60 people.

Introductory testing consisted of 25 tasks, aimed at perception/comprehension of a text (10 tasks), knowledge of vocabulary and revealed language matches (10 tasks) and knowledge of grammar and lexical structures (10 tasks).

The characteristic of student’s FC was the percentage of the completed tasks, which defined three levels of FC development:

- Low level: 0-49% of completed tasks;
- Average level: 50-74% of completed tasks;
- High level: 75-100% of completed tasks.

The work was conducted in three stages:

- Preparation stage included studying the European experience of content and language integrated learning of a FL, scientific-methodic and educational literature; we conducted the development of educational and testing materials in a FL;
- During the research stage, we defined the level of FC development prior to the beginning of the experiment;
- During the teaching stage, FL learning in the EG was conducted in accordance with the developed educational tasks, which corresponded to content and language integrated learning of a FL; the final testing was also conducted.

The teaching stage was conducted during two semesters on the base of 2-3rd years of a non-linguistic college.

## 3. Results

According to the results of the preliminary testing, 52% of the EG students (21 people) and 57% of the CG students (34 people) demonstrated low level of FC. Average level was presented by 38% of the EG students (15 people) and 35% of the CG students (21 people). Therefore, high level was found in 10% of the EG students (4 people) and 8% of the CG students (5 people).

FL learning in the EG was conducted with the use of the educational tasks based on the methodology of content and language integrated learning of a FL.

On the final stage of the experimental study, we conducted repetitive testing of EG and CG students with a test that consisted of three parts for defining the level of FC development for professional communication. The first part included professionally-oriented text and a number of tasks for understanding the read material, translation and generalization of information. The second part of the test was aimed at evaluating the correct use of lexical units in correspondence with the context: filling the gaps in the sentences with the suitable words. In the third part, the students had to create an abstract for a proposed professional text using linguistic set expression and following the main rules of writing it.

An overall table of the testing results in EG and CG before and after the experiment is presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** The results of FC development for professional communication

FC level	EG before the experiment, %	CG before the experiment, %	EG after the experiment, %	CG after the experiment, %
low	52	57	40	62
average	38	35	42,5	33
high	10	8	17,5	5

Statistical analysis of the results showed significant differences between EG and CG after the completion of the pedagogic experiment.

The EG and CG characteristics at the beginning of the pedagogic experiment corresponded, while after its completion they became different, therefore, it is possible to conclude that the changes in the EG are defined by the use of content and language integrated learning of a FL.

## 4. Discussion

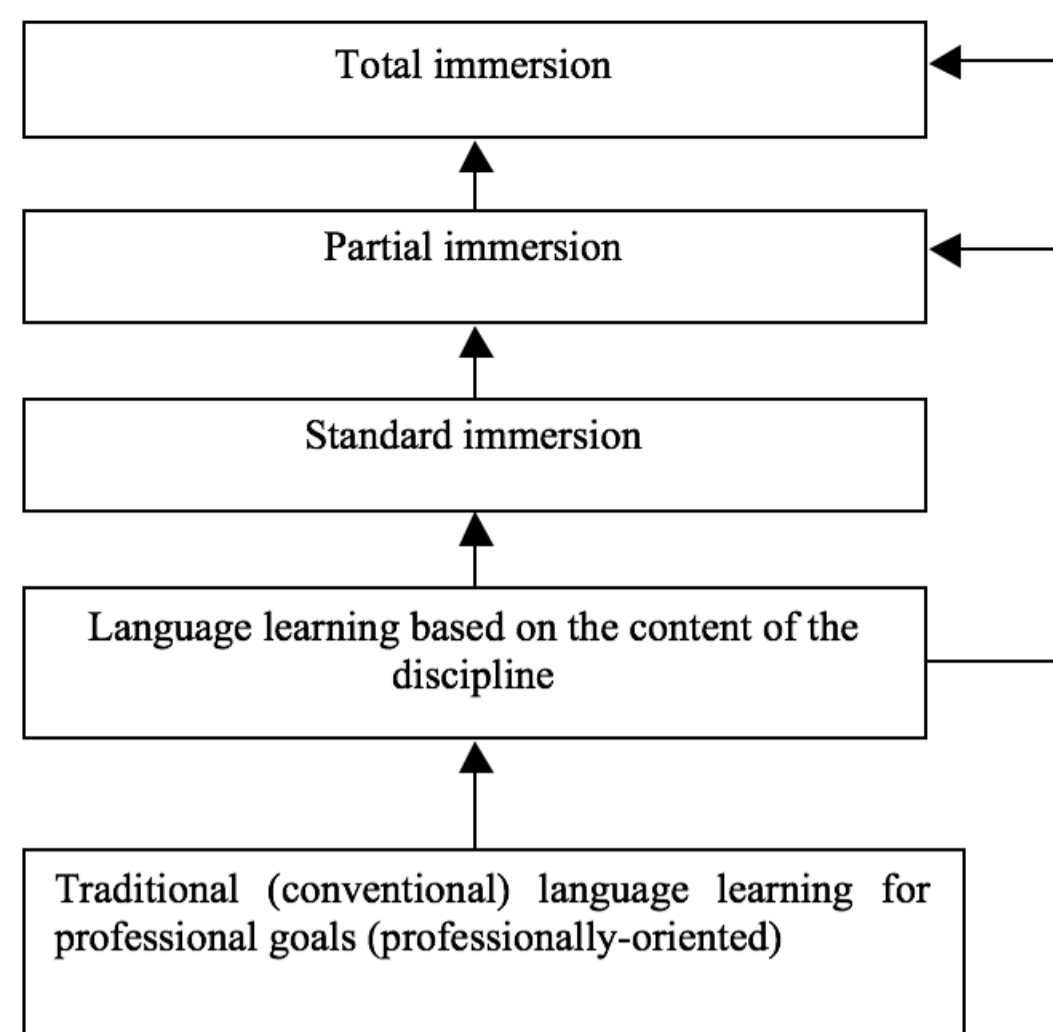
Analysis of the theoretical studies and the results of or experiment lead to the conclusion that, in the conditions of FL learning for professional communication in non-linguistic colleges a certain pattern of the sequence for transitioning from the traditional professionally-oriented foreign language learning to language learning based on the content of special disciplines, and finally, to foreign-language immersion (pic. 1).

According to this pattern/continuum, 1st-year students learn the FL during this language course based on professional orientation, i.e. in such way that, despite the essential connection between study materials and the prospective profession, the whole focus within the educational process is placed on the language and communication in it. This prepares the students on the linguistic, psychological and professional levels (the latter is provided primarily by the special disciplines of the 1st year) for the transition to higher level of language and specialty proficiency during the FL lessons in the 2nd year – to the level of their integrated learning through the integrated teaching of language and specialty content, when the latter either gets the main focus, or at least, equal to the linguistic aspect. As a result of mastering the language and speech, acquiring professional knowledge at the FL lessons occurs, in many ways, as a by-product.

It is known that in the majority of non-linguistic colleges, the FL course ends after the second year of studies. If the course is designed as we suggested above, then preliminary FL learning based on the specialty content prepares the students for foreign-language immersion starting from the 3rd year of studies. Such immersion is conducted not within the language course but on the courses in special disciplines. Certainly, at first, it is the introduction of simple forms of such immersion – standard and partial – when students’ language proficiency level is strictly considered. But its consideration and gradual increase over the 3rd and 4th years of studies allows increasing it by the 4th year in such way that, during the last year of studies, total foreign-language immersion becomes possible, and it is conducted without any apprehensions about possible surpass of the ranges of students’ actual language proficiency.

It is possible to suggest that, under more favorable conditions (such as bigger number of hours for FL learning in the junior years, continuation of special language learning in the 3rd year, etc.) and with the use of certain specific methods, it is possible to directly transition from teaching the language based on the specialty content in the language course to partial immersion, skipping the standard one. In separate cases of language learning based on the specialty content within a language course, it is even possible to directly transition to the total immersion, skipping both standard and partial immersion. The

possibility of such direct transitions is reflected on the diagram (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Diagram/continuum of the consequent transitions from the traditional professionally-oriented learning of a FL to learning based on the special disciplines content and to foreign-language immersion

However, all these types of transitions from one type of FL learning for professional communication in non-linguistic colleges to the other are just the modifications of the proposed integral approach, the essence of which, in general, consists in gradual rejection of the professionally-oriented learning method, which is traditional for the national non-linguistic colleges (with its primary focus on the studied language), and the transition to the method of integrated learning of the specialty and the FL (in different types of this general method, such as learning based on the content of professional educational subjects within the FL course and foreign-language immersion in the special disciplines courses).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the global practice has revealed two main advantages of method of integrated learning of a specialty and a FL over the traditional method of professionally-oriented learning.

The first advantage is the fact that, in case of the integrated learning, students' and teacher's attention is initially balanced between the content and the language with a certain priority of the content (language learning based on the specialty content within the FL course). Then, the attention is focused less and less on the language, and more – on the content (foreign-language immersion in the special disciplines courses). As a result of the FL learning, abilities and skills of professional communication are acquired, established and developed primarily implicitly, as a by-product of extra-linguistic activity. This creates significantly better conditions for the development of speaking abilities and skills, because such development becomes a rather *natural* process.

The reason for this lies in the fact that speaking activity, or speaking communication, is always a tool for conducting other types of activity. If this is the case, then, certainly, mastering foreign-language communication would be the most efficient only when this communication serves in its natural role – as a tool, which supports other types of activity. Using the language as a mean of extra-linguistic activity, when the language itself can be acquired only as a by-product of this activity, includes the mechanisms of implicit encoding and even imprinting, which, as it is well-known, makes learning of the linguistic material and the process of language and speech learning in general significantly easier; it also significantly increases the efficiency of this process.

The second advantage is the fact that it is almost impossible to separate FL learning and learning the prospective specialty within the integrated learning. As a result, FL learning turns into an almost professional discipline with all unconditionally positive consequences.

The experimental study showed that the changes in educational results in the experimental group are defined by the use of content and language integrated learning of a FL.

In general, the results of the experimental work show that the development of FC for professional communication based on the CLIL method for students of a non-linguistic college is efficient.

The conclusion of present article can be the statement of the necessity to develop all aspects, forms and modifications of the integrated FL learning for professional communication in non-linguistic colleges in the perspective of experimental and purely practical validation of CLIL. This is the main perspective of further studies in the field of optimization and intensification of FL teaching in the studied type of higher educational institutions.

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1. Engineering Academy, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), Russia, 117198 Moscow, Ordzhonikidze str., 3. Email: [irmamolchanova@gmail.com](mailto:irmamolchanova@gmail.com)

2. Engineering Academy, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), Russia, 117198 Moscow, Ordzhonikidze str., 3

3. Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), Russia, 117198 Moscow, Ordzhonikidze str., 3

4. Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), Russia, 117198 Moscow, Ordzhonikidze str., 3

5. Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, 117997, Russian Federation, Moscow, Stremyanny per., 36

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