
CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING AS A BILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL APPROACH IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

CLIL is an acronym for Content and Language Integrated Learning and an educational approach to language learning when an L2 is used in the teaching of non-language subjects. It has been a topical issue in European education for quite a few years and is continually moving into mainstream education in Europe. Within Europe, it is school institutions that represent the mainstream environments for foreign language learning, with English being the predominantly taught language. Moreover, teachers and people concerned in education are interested in increasing the efficiency of English as a foreign language instruction at schools, which has led to the introduction of several innovative approaches to teaching English as a foreign language, including CLIL. While the term CLIL was developed in Europe, it can be seen as part of a global trend, especially regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction. Although the term itself was launched in 1994, the practice of content and language integrated learning has been around much longer with its roots in immersion education from the 1970s and 1980s. In the presented article, CLIL as a bilingual educational approach will be put in European context and CLIL approaches in some countries within the European Union will be described.

Keywords: CLIL, bilingual education, communication, European union, foreign languages

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can be defined as an educational approach that involves learning and teaching curricular subjects through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students learning at primary, secondary or even tertiary level in some form of mainstream education. It aims for students to reach proficiency in both the subject and language. The idea of a CLIL programme being born about 20 years ago across Europe to meet the expectations and needs to communicate in foreign languages effectively has

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over the years attracted attention from educational bodies at all levels of education. This multiple-skills approach offers students an opportunity to acquire a second language by learning non-linguistic subjects through a foreign language. In other words, it gives the opportunity to non-native English speakers to acquire English through a natural approach [1].

According to *The European Symposium on the Changing European Classroom – the Potential of Plurilingual Education*, held in March 2005 in cooperation with the Luxemburg Presidency, about 450 million people coming out of various nations, communities, social and cultural backgrounds and from different language groups live and work in the European Union today. To meet the expectations of the globalized world, in which people need to communicate effectively, the governments of the member states emphasised the knowledge of foreign languages as one of the basic skills and the pupils should master at least two foreign languages at the end of the compulsory schooling as one of the prerequisites for successful participation in the Member States of the EU. The European Commission promotes the development of multilingualism through programmes for secondary education and Erasmus programme for higher education.

Moreover, in the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 18, 2006 on key competences for Lifelong Learning [http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm], eight key competences are introduced and described. Among those key competences are for example the following ones:

- “communication in the mother tongue, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;”
- “communication in foreign languages, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;”
- “learning to learn is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organize one’s own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one’s own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities.”
- In addition, the Luxemburg symposium (2005) recalled “the need to ensure that pupils and students receive CLIL provision at different levels of school education” [Report on the implementation of the Action Plan ‘Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity’, 2007, <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2007/EN/1-2007-554-EN-F2-1.Pdf>]. It also emphasized the need for special training in CLIL for teachers.

In a survey conducted by the European Commission in 2006, 56% of respondents reported being able to speak a language other than their mother tongue [2]. In the Framework Strategy on Multilingualism (2005), the EU

Commission adopted the long-term objective of increasing individual multilingualism until every citizen has had practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue [3]. The document also discusses the initiative to encourage multilingualism to foster growth and jobs in the information society as skills in several languages increase opportunities on the labour market and make a workforce more mobile [3].

In Europe, there is currently not a consistent educational system; national educational systems reflect traditions and cultures of different European countries. Curriculum modernization and innovation pressures are clear and are related to concept of implementation of key competences and learning outcomes. Raising learners' intercultural competence in foreign language teaching is dealt with in [4, 5].

2. The origins of Content and Language Integrated Learning

The origins of content and language integrated learning date back to the 1970s and relate to the emergence of communicative methods. Following the growth of content teaching in foreign languages, a number of new approaches emerged, like LAC – Language Across Curriculum, TBLL – Task-based Language Learning, CBI – Content-based Instructions, CBT – Content-based Teaching. As previously mentioned CLIL as a method of language teaching first appeared in Europe and is very European-oriented. It strives to provide the society with sufficient language knowledge; at the same time enabling mutual communication and contributing to the preservation of European language diversity. New role models for Slovak youth in the context of communication are described in [6].

Besides Finland, CLIL methodology became established in Poland, Austria and Spain. It is implemented under various names, such as EMIL in France, AICLE in Spain or TTO in the Netherlands. The results of different CLIL projects demonstrate that being exposed to foreign languages in school environment is motivating and stimulating for students and has the potential of developing their abilities, not only the language ones. Various research projects (e.g. Eleanitz in the Basque Country) show evidence that learners taught by CLIL achieve better results when compared to learners in traditional teaching [7].

3. European countries and CLIL

Over the last years, many European countries have shown a growing interest in CLIL. What makes Europe's traditionally monolingual national education systems change, is the pressure of „the internationalisation of communication, the increasing diversification of populations as a result of mobility and immigration, and the need to strive for the integration of the Union by enhancing the multilingualism of its citizens“ [8]. These three factors have initiated a series of educational practices within Europe which are denoted under

the umbrella term CLIL. Official European documents define CLIL as an effective and innovative teaching and learning approach.

3.1. Finland

The founder of CLIL methodology and the term itself is David Marsh of the University of Jyväskylä, in Finland. In Finland, CLIL is provided in English, Finnish, French, German, Russian, Sami and Swedish. As Marsh et al. state, Finland and the Netherlands are the countries offering the highest number of programmes taught in English as a second or foreign language in Europe [9]. The scale of CLIL programmes in Finland varies from very small-scale implementations to large-scale implementations. Some schools offer either one term or a whole academic year in CLIL, others teach CLIL even during a longer period stretching over a number of years. There have also been some experiments with using a foreign language in the teaching of all subjects during one week. In 1996, CLIL methodology was actively implemented in 251 Finnish schools (179 elementary and 72 secondary schools) [10], whereas in 2005 the number decreased to 106, which indicates a drop in the number of schools offering CLIL since 1996 [9]. This decrease can be partly explained by the fact that the ‘fashion period’ of CLIL implementation passed over.

The most common subjects taught in English, which is the most common language adopted, in elementary schools are Environmental Science, Music, Mathematics and Geography, and History, Biology, Geography and Physics in secondary schools. According to the national core curriculum, in all of the languages of instruction, every student should reach the language level enabling them to achieve the objectives of content learning, with the basic objectives being defined at least for comprehension and production skills and for cultural learning goals [9]. Education in Finland is highly autonomous, thus permitting schools to choose a foreign language, intensity of CLIL activities and content subjects.

3.2. Germany

Although officially Germany is a monolingual country, there is a number of minority groups who try to educate their children bilingually, which makes Germany a multilingual and multicultural country. As Wolff [11] points out integrated language and content education has had a long history in the German school system, with first mostly private schools in the first half of the 20th century offering another language to teach content subjects. In the 1960s and 70s, it was French that was the only CLIL language used in the grammar schools which implemented bilingual branches. Nowadays, CLIL schools can be found throughout the whole country and many of them have bilingual branches with English being the language of instruction. Traditional CLIL is implemented in Germany mainly in grammar schools, although vocational schools have also started using this type of education. Prevailing languages are English and

French, but also Italian, Spanish, Dutch and Russian are used (the latter two in very few schools). Subjects taught through CLIL are mostly Geography, History, Art, Music or Physical Education. According to reliable statistical data, in Nordrhein-Westfalen, in the school year 2004/2005 there were 188 schools offering CLIL. The vast majority of schools offered English (151), then French (23 schools), Italian (5 schools), Greek (3 schools), Dutch (5 schools) and Spanish (1 school). With all languages of instruction, far behind grammar schools come comprehensive schools and so-called Realschulen [11].

CLIL in Germany is regarded not as a language-oriented but rather as a content-oriented approach [11]. This is reflected in assessment when content is ranked higher than the language. Teachers in Germany who study two subjects at university and get a teaching degree are automatically qualified to teach also in bilingual schools. However, they are required to obtain additional qualification in different courses at universities or national teaching centres to be fully qualified to teach through CLIL. Methodological approaches within CLIL in schools are quite traditional, although modern procedures like group work or project work are also used. Materials are prepared mostly by teachers themselves, very often using foreign materials and adapting them to their own needs. Research in CLIL has become important in recent years in Germany, with major topics being language-learning outcomes, content-learning outcomes, or reading academic texts in a foreign language [11].

3.3. Hungary

Content-based language teaching in Hungary is carried out in two forms – teaching in order to gain competence in the language (enrichment form) and teaching ethnic minority students in their own language [12]. CLIL has been realized in Hungary since 1985 when it was officially allowed to carry out education in other language than Hungarian. According to Hungarian laws, schools implementing CLIL are required to design a specific language syllabus, they must teach culture of the target language countries and three subjects must be taught in the target language. Such schools get extra financial support from educational budget and studying in them is free.

In Hungary, CLIL is realized over a long period of time, at least 4 years [12]. CLIL programmes are implemented in secondary as well as primary schools and are both linguistically and content-oriented. The number of CLIL programmes in both types of schools has been constantly increasing, with 121 secondary-school CLIL programmes and 56 primary-school CLIL programmes being available in the school year 2002/2003 [12]. As for the subjects taught in CLIL, at primary level these are mainly cognitively less demanding subjects like Art or Singing and Science, History and Information Technology are the subject taught at upper primary level. National history is taught in the mother language. At the secondary level, the range of subjects taught through CLIL is broad, allowing for any subject except for Hungarian language and literature to be taught in a foreign language. The distribution of languages within CLIL

programmes is very similar to those in the surrounding countries, with English ranked in the first place and followed by German, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian. The effects of electronic media on cognitive processes, also in the process of learning, are described in [13]. The area of critical thinking development is also mentioned in [14, 15].

Dually qualified secondary-school teachers in Hungary are enabled to teach in CLIL programmes. Primary-school teachers can, besides general training, specialize in primary foreign language teaching as well, since 1991 both in German and English. Moreover, CLIL teachers are required to have an above-average command of the target language. In-service teacher training for CLIL started in 2004 at ELTE University in Budapest [12].

Generally, the methodology used in CLIL classes reflects the methodology of foreign language teaching, including the use of visual aids or monolingual explanations, and the materials that are used are designed and developed by schools and teachers themselves and sometimes disseminated over the country. CLIL research in Hungary aims at examining the topics like the role of bilingual schools in the educational system or the issue of code-switching [12].

3.4. Austria

In the view of [16] foreign language teaching in primary schools has had a long tradition in Austria, starting in the 1960s when Austrian primary school children were exposed to a foreign language at the upper primary level for one hour per week. Since the 1990s, one or two foreign languages (English and French) at lower secondary level and at least two foreign languages at upper secondary level are compulsory. Apart from German, which is the language of instruction in Austria, other languages, e.g. languages of minorities (Croatian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian or Slovene), can be used as languages of instruction.

Today, CLIL in Austria is realized at both primary and secondary levels [16]. At lower primary level, a foreign language is taught in cross-curricular way, which means that it is integrated into the compulsory subjects like Maths, Art, Early Science or Physical Education. This integrated foreign language learning when children are introduced to the foreign language for one hour per week lays the foundations for future foreign language learning. At secondary level, CLIL first appeared in 1991 when a national project group was set up in Graz by Austrian Ministry of Education to consolidate various bilingual initiatives in Austrian secondary schools. The work of the national project group resulted in writing a series of theoretical and practical publications, in-service trainings and conferences on this topic. Many teaching materials were provided for teachers interested in CLIL, disseminated not only in Austria but also in other European countries [16].

In Austria, CLIL is known under the term ‘*Englisch als Arbeitssprache*’ meaning “the use of English (or any other FL) in teaching situations ranging from short projects to bilingual education throughout the whole school year”

[16] and it is an established part of mainstream education in Austria. The current CLIL situation in Austrian secondary schools ranges from so-called mini projects, or a few lessons in CLIL to fully bilingual schooling. In the vast majority of cases English is the target language of CLIL provision. CLIL is used in all types of schools, including vocational schools. It is practised through projects, for a limited time of a school year or throughout the whole school year in one or more subjects. The number of secondary schools offering CLIL is relatively high – 15%. All subjects except German language can be used for CLIL [17].

Besides Austrian teachers, native speakers are employed in schools with CLIL provision or in bilingual schools. Qualified Austrian teachers teaching in primary or secondary schools are not required to have any additional formal qualifications for CLIL but many teacher training colleges offer CLIL training within their methodology courses. Primary school teachers can attend in-service training to enhance their language skills or continuing education seminars on CLIL. There is sufficient provision of materials – teachers either develop their own materials or adapt existing ones in the target language to their teaching needs. Future developments, suggestions and recommendations on this topic include for example the extension of CLIL to other languages other than English or implementing CLIL into a higher educational level [16].

3.5. Poland

The language situation in Poland has slightly changed after 1989, when except Polish, which is still the only official language, some minority languages such as Kashubian can be taught at schools and used in offices [18]. The level of foreign language teaching, including Russian and English, used to be quite low due to the low number of qualified teachers and a lack of teaching materials.

In 1970s, a number of high schools in Poland introduced bilingual education. When compared with ordinary schools, these schools provided an increase in the number of language lessons or teaching of some subjects in English for the whole or part of a lesson [18]. These schools provided teaching content through the medium of English when English was a medium of communication rather than the object of study.

CLIL in Poland is denoted as LAC (Language Across Curriculum) and its main objective is to prepare students for work and study abroad. Polish CLIL is not institutionalized, which means that its implementation depends on financial and human resources of individual schools. The languages involved are English, being the most popular, then German, French and Spanish. The lessons are run by dually qualified teachers and in some cases language teachers work together with content subject teachers.

The choice of subjects strongly depends on the availability of teachers being able to teach content through a foreign language [18]. According to [17], any school subject except for Polish language and literature, the history and geography of Poland and the second foreign language can be taught in a foreign

language. The most popular subjects delivered through CLIL in Poland are Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History and Geography.

The number of dual-qualified teachers in Poland is increasing, which represents a potential for CLIL as the interest in CLIL in Poland is enormous. Teaching through the medium of a foreign language takes place at primary, secondary as well as tertiary level, although not being denoted as CLIL at this level of schooling. There are no special teaching training institutions preparing CLIL teachers [18]. There is also no special CLIL methodology, the methodology of the content subject is used and teachers use original target-language course books or they search for materials and design them themselves. The research on CLIL in Poland is still in its infancy, no special research on the effects and outcomes of CLIL is carried out.

3.6. The Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, bilingual education is realized either within the project of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic as specified in the National Plan for Target Language Teaching approved in 2005 on the one hand or fully or partially also in other schools where the bilingual education of Ministry of Education is tolerated, on the other. Schools are allowed to provide instruction through a target language in several selected subjects.

From 1990 to 1995, bilingual education was realized in form of a five-year study at four schools (two in Bohemia and two in Moravia), namely in the French language. Since 1996, bilingual education has been organized in form of a six-year study [19]. Although these schools are called bilingual in the Czech Republic, in European educational context, this approach is called CLIL. The aim is to reach some level of bilingualism with learners, or in other words, to shift from a certain level of foreign language knowledge to a higher, intermediate level of foreign language knowledge. Nowadays, bilingual education in the Czech Republic is realized at 18 bilingual secondary grammar schools with English, German, French, Italian and Spanish being the instructional languages. The students can take the maturity exam partly in a selected foreign language.

The bilingual education is not purely a language preparation but a type of education aimed at academic or natural sciences subjects, in which several subjects are taught in other than a mother tongue. In the first two years of study, a foreign language is taught intensively. Since the third year of study, several selected subjects are taught in the foreign language. Syllabus and curriculum are designed and elaborated in co-operation with foreign partners and experts from foreign and Czech universities. Foreign and Czech textbooks and teaching materials are used. Concurrent optional seminars for students and an intensive program in the Czech language prepared for the subject in the sixth year enable students to perfectly master Czech terminology of the subjects and so to balance irregularities between the foreign and mother tongue specific terminology

development. The target (foreign) language represents almost 100% of the total language of instruction in the several compulsory subjects. Formal language classes in the target (foreign) language, aimed at the development of general communicative competence, continue until the end of the school attendance, with three 45-minute lessons a week on average.

The education and training is provided by Czech and foreign teachers who are fully qualified for teaching of the subjects. According to [20], Czech CLIL involves several types of teachers starting with Czech teachers who are fully qualified to teach in the content areas and having sufficient knowledge of the target language; then Czech teachers fully qualified in both the content subject and the foreign language (as previously mentioned, there is a lack of such teachers, mainly in natural sciences subjects); and ending with foreign or exchange teachers supported by foreign ministries of education or European educational programmes. Czech teachers often attend language and methodological seminars abroad, often prepared by a foreign partner institution.

In February 2000, a systematic course for training in CLIL in an optional seminar was launched at Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague [19]. This special optional seminar is intended for students of master's study and it has been run by the Department of Mathematics and the Department of English Language and Literature. The aim of the course is to provide students involved in teacher education with an overview of both theoretical and practical aspects of CLIL, namely in teaching Mathematics in English [20].

Novotná and Hofmannová in [20] point out that each school is given a certain degree of freedom in the way in which CLIL is implemented, i.e. selection of content subjects, number of lessons a week, choice of textbooks and teaching materials and methodology.

4. Conclusions

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can be defined as an educational approach that involves learning and teaching curricular subjects through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students learning at primary, secondary or even tertiary level in some form of mainstream education. It aims for students to reach proficiency in both the subject and language. The idea of a Content and Language Integrated Learning programme being born about 20 years ago across Europe to meet the expectations and needs to communicate in foreign languages effectively has over the years attracted attention from educational bodies at all levels of education. This multiple-skills approach offers students an opportunity to acquire a second language by learning non-linguistic subjects through a foreign language. In other words, it gives the opportunity to non-native English speakers to acquire English through a natural approach [1]. Theories explaining first and second language acquisition are described in [21].

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