

Teaching foreign languages by means of CLIL in selected European countries

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the outcomes of the recently finished project in selected European countries, supported by the European Union, particularly within the project Erasmus+, KA2 Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, Strategic Partnerships for school education. This paper presents the project outlines and interprets the project outcomes carried out in primary and secondary schools in Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and Italy. It focuses on interpretations of data collected through document analyses and observations concerning the CLIL lessons carried out in the above mentioned European countries. The project has been considered a "Good practice project" by the Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation.

Keywords: CLIL, primary and secondary schools, multiculturalism, diversity, good CLIL practice

Introduction

CLIL has developed into a holistic approach, since it was first coined by David Marsh in 1994, to deep learning of foreign languages in which all learners can succeed. Empirical research carried out, not only in this project, confirms that there is no one model for CLIL. This statement has also been verified in the recently finished project, named "Transnational exchange of good CLIL practice among European Educational Institutions". The project set up the crucial question in its beginning – "What is a good CLIL practice?" We have carried out document analyses and observed diverse forms of CLIL application and we think that CLIL diversity is the good practice we were looking for obviously if CLIL basic principle of duality is followed in CLIL activities or lessons. Finally, it has been proved that due to the diversity of historical, economic, national, and educational contexts there are several good CLIL practices.

Theoretical background

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) has become more and more popular in Europe since its emergence in the mid-1990s. It is a 'dual focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language' (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010). Marsh states that CLIL is an umbrella term covering methods used in educational settings to combine the teaching of subjects, such as geography or science, with the learning of a foreign language (Marsh, 2002). One of the best-known CLIL conceptual frameworks is the 4Cs framework (culture, communication, content and cognition) (Coyle et al. 2010) embedded in a relevant context, which can provide a background for the development of all CLIL activities in a given learning environment.

Since CLIL was presented for the first time by Marsh in 1994, the European Union has been actively encouraging its citizens to learn other European languages in order to understand and communicate in more than one language. Moreover, many researchers have published in their papers a rapid growth of CLIL implementation in European primary and later also secondary schools (e.g. Coonan 2005, Dalton-Puffer & Nikula 2006, Coyle et al. 2010). The CLIL boom has resulted in involvement of this new innovative approach into the mainstream education throughout Europe (Coyle 2009).

CLIL has also been applied in Slovak schools, both primary and secondary, for nearly 15 years (Pokrivčáková et al. 2015). Pokrivčáková (2015) summarized results of CLIL research projects conducted at some universities in Slovakia (e.g. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra and Žilina University), and also at the National Institute of Education in Bratislava and they all proved positive impact of CLIL on the development of learners' communicative competences in a foreign language (Pokrivčáková et al. 2015). Based on above mentioned findings, a new project was submitted with the aim to share Slovak outcomes in selected European countries (Kováčiková & Luprichová 2018).

Methodology

The project was proposed in accordance with the Education and Training in Europe 2020 document (European Commission, 2013) highlighting that “Foreign language skills can enhance the employability of young people”. The submitted project followed recommendations in a mentioned document and set up the following objectives:

1. Setting up essential components of good CLIL practice in the classroom by face-to-face observations.
2. Preparing Modular e-training course for European CLIL teachers.
3. Providing countries with none or less CLIL experience with essential training and learning opportunities so that they can commence implementing this approach in their schools.
4. Training teachers from the project partner countries on CLIL.
5. Setting up an open database of class recordings and other teaching and methodological materials for CLIL teachers.
6. Collecting research data and conducting a comparative analysis of CLIL practice.
7. Providing universities and other public bodies dealing with educational research with the results and main conclusions of the project as a possible basis to start providing either English-medium instruction study programs or study programs for future teachers.

The coordinating institution was Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, and participating countries included Sweden (Alströmergymnasiet upper-secondary school in Alingsås), Latvia (Daugavpils pilsetas Izglītības parvalde – Education Department – offered three different primary and secondary schools in Daugavpils), Lithuania (Vilnius Jonas Basanavicius progimnazija in Vilnius), Italy (Liceo Statale A. Manzoni secondary school in Caserta), and the second university from Slovakia (the Slovak University of Technology in Trnava). The project consisted of partners from various educational levels - universities, educational institution, and representatives of primary and secondary schools. It was the unique partnership of people with experience of implementation of CLIL in a learning process on one hand, as well as institutions with none or less experience with CLIL itself. From another point of view, the strategic partnership involved countries with a vast CLIL experience (Latvia, Slovakia, Italy) and also countries with none or less experience in implementing the CLIL (Sweden, Lithuania). All partners were actively involved in activities which included: observation classes, preparing video recordings of CLIL classes, preparing a Modular e-training course, Open CLIL Database and finally, the university partners prepared the research data collection and comparative analysis of lesson plans and curriculum. The last mentioned activity is a part of this paper. The project coordinator, together with the other university partner from Slovakia and a partner from Italy, developed and implemented the CLIL pilot training for teachers within the partnership.

The project focused on the research of the document analyses (lesson plans, curriculum), particularly in the following areas:

- CLIL as a part of a national curriculum;
- Compulsory or selective teaching and learning through CLIL;
- Economic or other financial advantages concerning CLIL implementation at schools;
- The willingness of stakeholders, teachers, learners and parents to educate or be educated through CLIL;
- Future visions of CLIL in respective countries.

A qualitative design of research was chosen for this study as the aim of the research was to capture a holistic view on CLIL issue. The methods of document analyses and observation were employed.

With the aim to find out the good CLIL practice we have stated the following research questions:

1. What are the historical, economical and national official requirements regarding CLIL in respective countries?
2. What is the practical implication of CLIL processes in educational institutions?

CLIL lessons in all involved countries were observed by the project participants, for instance each lesson was observed by at least three to a maximum of seven people from participated countries. Observations were carried out in the period from February 2016 until February 2017. The observation sheets involved following information:

- CLIL language;
- CLIL activity time;
- The language used for communication;
- Content language;
- Scaffolding techniques used for the content and language;
- Code-switching (L1 versus CLIL language);
- Materials/resources used;
- Assessment.

The observation aimed to find out the practical implication of CLIL as well as finding a good CLIL practice that could be recommended to the institutions dealing with implementation of CLIL (primary and secondary schools in respective countries).

Results and discussion

The document analyses

The first research question was followed by the document analyses with the aim to find out whether the context for CLIL implementation in selected European countries, within the project, is the same or comparable. Documents are considered the standardized artefacts and they are written for a purpose, such as notes, reports, statistics, policy documents, expert opinions, etc. (Flick 2010). Therefore, research was aimed at comparison of similar categories found in the documents of participating institutions.

It shows that out of all participating project partners, only Italian Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR 2010) introduced CLIL into the Italian school system as mandatory in *Licei* and *Istituti tecnici* in 2010. MIUR set up the parameters of CLIL courses for teachers who wanted to know more about CLIL and teachers' competences in foreign languages. MIUR (2010) specified the level of the foreign language of CLIL teachers, at least C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference, and it also set up specifications for students in all lyceums and technical institutes, where CLIL has been implemented. Teachers were allowed to apply the CLIL in the fifth year of all lyceums and technical schools in the following subjects: History, Geography, Philosophy, Math, Physics, Natural Sciences, Art History, Physical Education, and Religion.

Bilingual education in Latvia was developed and introduced to schools very quickly due to the State Program of Latvian Language Acquisition, and presented by the Latvian Language Agency on 1st November 1995. The Agency offers teacher-trainers' courses, the development of future plans in bilingual education, as well as the program of sustainability. As of 2006, the Agency has introduced the professional development program for CLIL teacher-trainers, teachers, and materials for students in cooperation with the British Council using the experience of bilingual education. They were offering in years 2006 – 2017 further education for teachers willing to achieve CLIL methodology, including:

- The professional development program with master classes – 36 hours;
- The professional development program for teachers of history, biology, mathematics, economy, culture – 60 hours;
- CLIL methodology course – 36 hours;
- British Council course on CLIL methodology – 50 hours.

Schools in Latvia provide two approaches to CLIL – traditional and non-traditional. The traditional one involves learning the subject content in a foreign language at the subject lesson. The second one focuses on non-traditional work forms, such as projects, creative workshops, surveys, experimental laboratories, etc. The content is given wider and deeper than it is defined by standards provided by the Latvian Language Agency in cooperation with the British Council. It is organized as an optional lesson, after classes.

The most sceptical partner, at the beginning of running the project, was Sweden. They had doubts that they would ever utilize the CLIL because the proficiency in English is highly valued in the society as well as within the school system in Sweden, as it is mandatory from primary schools throughout to upper secondary schools. Therefore, there was disbelief that it could increase students' foreign language skills as they are exposed to English outside the school a lot. CLIL has been offered to Swedish schools, mainly to upper secondary, since 1977, but only a few of them joined the CLIL consortium. As of 1992, after formulating national objectives and general guidelines in the new school law, many upper secondary schools, and later compulsory schools, have offered CLIL programs for their students. The CLIL boom finished by 1999 in secondary and upper secondary schools but it is still widespread within the schools in Years 10 – 12 with a variety of forms (Dentler 2007) because the main aim is to increase learners' motivation for studying foreign languages and thus promote their good command of communicative competences for future work and study abroad. Although CLIL is not directly endorsed in the Swedish curriculum, it is offered as an option at approximately 27% of all upper secondary schools in Sweden and students can choose if they want to follow regular programs or CLIL ones (Kristiansen & Vikor 2006). Our partner, finally, appreciated their involvement in the project because they found the CLIL an effective method for teaching not only their students with lower communication skills but mainly refugees to make them familiar with the Swedish language.

In 2001, the Ministry of Education in Lithuania initiated bilingual education as a part of the educational reform. A year later, the CLIL methodology was introduced to the education system with the Guidelines project aiming at encouraging a wider implementation of CLIL in the system of general education in Lithuania. Since that time, several projects, co-funded by the European Union, have been carried out in Lithuania, but findings revealed the lack of a systematic approach towards the implementation of CLIL in Lithuania (Targamadzė & Kriaučiūnienė 2016). Therefore, the British Council together with the Ministry of Education and Science organized events aiming at teacher training throughout the country with a focus on the development of teaching content through the medium of English. The main outcomes of all meetings included:

- Development of teaching resources;
- An increase in methodology and content knowledge;
- Development of schools' and teachers' network;
- Gaining more experience in CLIL.

Nowadays, learning content through the CLIL methodology is offered as an optional lesson once a week in some Lithuanian schools mostly in a tandem mode, it means that both content and language teachers are available at lessons. Most of these lessons are provided in a soft version, except Information technology and Science, which are taught in a hard version (more than 50 per cent of a lesson is in a target language).

The CLIL methodology was perceived positively by teachers, pupils, parents, and institutions in all involved countries. Practically, all principles and models of CLIL were adapted to the educational, institutional and personal contexts of the particular countries. The positive sides were visible in the enthusiastic and supportive approach of teachers, innovative model of language- and subject-teacher cooperation. The challenges were seen in the model of the whole CLIL lessons instead of shorter and more effective CLIL activities in some cases. The same applies to the content and language scaffolding techniques where the collective forms of pair and group work are applied through the project work,

discussions and role-plays engaging and activating the pupils aiming towards the learner-centered approach. Regarding the teaching material, the only country with ready-made published CLIL textbooks was Italy. The rest of the project countries searched for the materials on the websites, Internet or authentic textbooks in the target language.

None of the countries assessed the performance of the pupils with grades. Instead, positive oral or written feedback was used to motivate the learners. All in all, we can say that CLIL was adjusted to teachers' possibilities, educational background, and learners' language proficiency.

Observations

Observation in Italy was carried out at the upper secondary school *Liceo Statale Alessandro Manzoni* Caserta in May 2016. Generally, this school offers to its students CLIL lessons in French or English in the following non-linguistic subjects – History, Physics, Drama, Literature, Civics, Arts and Economics, and all CLIL teachers are fully competent to teach their subjects in foreign languages because they are both content and language teachers and they are experienced in providing CLIL lessons for a long time.

One lesson, History, was provided in French and other subjects were instructed in English and Italian languages. They applied the model of the hard version of CLIL. Scaffolding techniques for content and language were visuals such as pictures, maps, miming, and gestures. Code-switching to mother tongue was used by teachers when explaining the details, discussing issues more in detail as well as the disciplinary problems. The materials used for CLIL lessons were published materials directly for CLIL either in French or English. Italy was the only country with such an advantage where the CLIL materials are ready-made for the teachers and learners. The assessment was provided orally and no grades were given throughout the observed lessons. Observers provided some negative comments on the teaching styles of the teachers – for example, teacher talking time prevailed, in lots of cases students may have been more actively involved and engaged during the lessons.

The second country, Sweden, particularly in a town Alingsås, *Alströmergymnasiet* – the upper secondary school, three CLIL lessons were observed. As it was mentioned earlier in the paper, CLIL is not directly endorsed in the Swedish curriculum and this school has proved that the use of CLIL is unnecessary because a large number of teachers have good command in English and the most of students' proficiency level is also high. The observations were carried out in the following subjects – Sociology, Linguistics and Health Care. As for the time devoted to CLIL, they also applied a hard form of CLIL, the whole lessons were in a target language. Scaffolding techniques for content and language were mainly group discussions, pictures, and videos used in the lessons. Only the pair or group works were in Swedish. The lessons were supported by the use of the internet and IT technologies. They had no printed textbooks or materials which could be used in the lessons. Comparing to Italian lessons, Swedish students were actively engaged, and they used computers with every given task. The observers highly appreciated the development of critical thinking which was evident through discussions, role-plays and project works. As for the assessment, students were given no grades, just oral evaluation, including support and encouragement. Only one lesson was taught in a tandem mode because a subject teacher was not skilled enough in the target language, so the language teacher took a part in the lesson, however, they were both actively involved.

The following observed partner was an educational institution in Latvia – *Daugavpils pilsetas Izglītības parvalde* in Daugavpils, which has many primary, lower secondary and secondary schools with CLIL classes in its competency. These schools provide two approaches to CLIL – traditional and non-traditional. The traditional one involves learning the subject content in a foreign language at the subject lesson. The second one focuses on non-traditional work forms, such as projects, creative workshops, surveys, experimental laboratories, etc., and CLIL lessons are optional and most recommended to the best students. Most of the observed classes, including Biology, Math, Science, Geography, Civic Education and History, were provided in a tandem mode, in other words, with both subject and language

teachers. While a subject teacher was responsible for the content, a language teacher was responsible for the linguistic issues in the lesson. CLIL was applied during the whole lesson and mother tongue was used just for explanation, instructions or disciplinary issues. Scaffolding techniques ranged from visual aids, through stories, miming, discussions, and debates. Materials used in the lessons were chosen by the teachers, including original outdated English textbooks, which were provided to schools by different donations and charities. As for grades, students were provided oral feedback by teachers and encouragement during the lessons. Given the fact that the language competence of content teachers was in some cases much lower than the B2 level, the presence of a language teacher in the lesson was appropriate.

The last project partner was from Vilnius, Lithuania, particularly *Vilnius Jonas Basanavicius progimnazija*. This partner did not have much experience with the CLIL methodology. They had implemented it only in the music lessons in French. After joining the training course, offered by the project, CLIL was implemented with English in Mathematics, Biology, and Arts. The school followed similar criteria than Latvian schools – it means that CLIL lessons were only for the selected pupils, chosen mainly according to their language proficiency. In spite of this fact, students were motivated, supported and encouraged, but not graded. The whole lessons were instructed in English with code-switching to Lithuanian language in case of giving instructions, or disciplinary issues. Regarding the content and language scaffolding the pictures, videos, pictures, and project work were used unfortunately with the very widely used translations. The provided materials in the lessons were mainly authentic ones from the internet or English textbooks. The pupils were supported and encouraged by the positive approach of enthusiastic teachers. However, the teaching style was rather teacher-centered and sometimes students could have been more actively engaged in the learning process by pair or group work.

Conclusion

The question, set up at the beginning of the project (*“What is a good CLIL practice?”*), proved that there are several types of good CLIL practices. It is caused by different economic, historical, national and educational contexts:

- post-soviet countries, Latvia and Lithuania, apply a very strong teacher-centered education in schools, and the level of the language proficiency of teachers is insufficient. Therefore, some schools prefer a tandem mode (both subject and language teachers in a class) while using the CLIL methodology. Moreover, the CLIL lessons are provided for the students with the best level of foreign language proficiency and not for all of them. Even though students are not graded, they received a good amount of motivation, support, and encouragement. The most important fact is that students achieve better results in a foreign language since they attend CLIL lessons;

- Italy and Sweden belong to countries where teachers have good command of English or other foreign languages which are used in CLIL lessons. Sweden uses modern technologies instead of the textbooks with various learner-centered techniques such as project work, debates, role plays, etc. while in Italy, teachers are supported by the state with the published textbooks, workshops, and trainings for the CLIL teachers. In spite of the fact that Sweden considered the CLIL methodology not important to be included in their curriculum, they found it a good way in achieving adequate language skills for arriving immigrants.

To sum up, each country which has not still included CLIL into their curricula needs paradigm shifts in the organization of education and an update it to serve the world of today and tomorrow. The whole process should start at teachers' training colleges, preparing student-teachers for their future profession. However, not only students at departments of foreign languages but also students of other study programs, so-called content teachers. They also should achieve adequate foreign language skills, including a methodology of teaching foreign languages.

We may consider it as an advantage that CLIL is still not unified model applicable for any educational institution in any European country as a rigid set of rules, but rather a holistic approach to education itself. Teachers, within the CLIL lessons, use most current and authentic learning materials to inspire and motivate their students to be active participants in their mission for skills and knowledge, and on the other hand, students learn to communicate about subject matters in a non-invasive way (they do not concentrate on a language itself). Moreover, they practice problem-solving skills, communication skills, cooperation skills, and critical thinking, as well as they are scaffolded to build their own frames of knowledge.

Finally, there is necessary to mention one more note, considering the outcomes and experience from the mentioned project. Various educational agencies or departments have taken over themselves a role of trainers in the CLIL methodology. We may assume that this role belongs to Faculties of Education, Colleges or Universities providing either English-medium instruction study programs or study programs for future teachers. Based on this experience and a study the university partners involved in the above mentioned project have recently carried out (Luprichová & Hurajová 2017), a new project will be submitted soon, but now within the university environment.

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