



The Experience of Implementing CLIL in the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is not considered a new phenomenon in the educational process any more. The approach is employed widely at different levels of education in a lot of countries and different contexts. As it has mostly been promoted as an advantageous approach that enhances at the same time learners' language acquisition (L2 proficiency) as well as professional work-related knowledge, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) also applied it already five years ago.

This paper describes the complexity of the development of the implementation of CLIL (at both tertiary and vocational level of education) in an institutional establishment where students in the field of internal security are taught. It discusses the very first steps of introducing the term CLIL in the institution until five years later when CLIL has already been integrated in curricula. The article also presents supporting facts from a survey carried out among EASS students, showing the disadvantages and advantages of CLIL from students' perspective, as well as what methods they prefer and consider more efficient, the drawbacks and difficulties of implementing the approach.

1. Introduction

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) was as a term introduced at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) 5 years ago as an alternative to increasing the number of language classes. The main reason was the graduates' poor foreign languages skills for coping in professional environment.

As CLIL is considered an 'umbrella term' that includes many variants and/or a wide range of different approaches [4], [5] and is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Marsh et al 2010), it was found to be appropriate and suitable exactly for the context of professional higher education. Moreover, learners acquire languages much better while practicing, doing and solving practical cases or tasks in true to life environments and situations. Learners learn how, why and when to use the acquired skills. That all implied to the practical CLIL method and approach – an instrument for delivering a competence-led education. As Cole and Griffin stated [1], teaching theory without connecting it the daily practical learning of students is useless and inefficient. It is also one of the main aspects of new learning and teaching approach.

Within the last five years, we - the language teachers and some content teachers - have been conveying the good message of CLIL, but the process has not always been as smooth as expected, but eventually still successful.

The most complicated has been delivering the essence of CLIL to content teachers, i.e. changing their thinking.

In order to support the idea of implementing CLIL activities and their effectiveness, the Language Centre carried out a survey among the students of both tertiary and vocational level to see how they perceive the advantages and drawbacks of the innovative method as well as what and if they value CLIL modules/activities, which methods they prefer and what might hinder their success and the efficiency of the approach.

2. The Implementation of CLIL

2.1. Why CLIL and the beginning of the implementation of CLIL?

The author of the article agrees that although practicing CLIL requires a lot more work from both a content and language teacher, based on the author's own experience, it is still worth trying. Furthermore, students themselves have brought out the need for integrating subjects.

CLIL requires flexibility, openness, collaboration, more planning, and material design, it combines content, skills and languages. As Fortanet-Gomez [3] has stated, no matter which educational level it is, educational institutions have an aim to prepare not only students to become professionals, but also

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to prepare them for life by means of training in certain skills and abilities to help them to make informed decisions, or transmit to them certain values as how to act in socially and ethically responsible ways. The latter description is exactly where and why CLIL has to be applied, especially at professional higher educational institutions.

As for the EASS, the initiative for the implementation of CLIL came from language lecturers, it was then also their task to promote the approach and enlighten content teachers and the administration of the EASS for the approval.

The administration considered the implementation of CLIL to be truly innovative and suitable for higher professional education. As for content teachers the understanding about the advantages of CLIL was more time and energy demanding. The main argument of no CLIL was the time limit, too crammed subjects, no flexible curricula and syllabi, etc.

Still, fortunately, continuous lobbying and sharing good practice, meetings, personal relations with colleagues led to a collaboration between content and language teachers in-house and with other institutions outside Estonia.

2.2 The achievements in applying CLIL

As mentioned earlier, the process of the implementation of CLIL was complicated, but there were lecturers who saw CLIL as an effective innovation and ready to try integrating learning including team teaching. In 2011 we had CLIL in 11 subjects in 3 different colleges out of 4 where there were integrated classes with Russian or English lecturers.

Good practice of CLIL has led us to today's 18 integrated subjects where CLIL is applied, in Estonian, Russian and English, in all four colleges. Today we have integrated seminars, student conferences, practical activities, roleplays and integrated exams, where both the content and language are assessed. Since 2016 CLIL classes are mandatory in all curricula.

Although we have a fairly long experience in applying practical (soft or hard) CLIL, there is a long way to reach the hard CLIL with all its aspects, including LOCIT (Lesson Observation and Critical Incident Technique), which provides a framework for professional collaboration, confidence building and theory development a 'bottom-up' or practical perspective. The LOCIT process encourages teachers to work closely with each other to act as supportive 'critical friend' – someone who is trusted to provide constructive feedback. 'LOCIT colleagues are professionals who support and trust other professionals, who engage in supportive yet analytical dialogue. [2]

In addition to integrated activities in subjects, our lecturers have also designed CLIL e-learning materials (in Russian 'Processing emergency calls in Russian', 'Border checks' in English, e- course for border guard in Russian and English). These are a good example of networking and collaboration between experts and language teachers. Compilation of e-learning materials has been drawn by the need of digital era because computers have become a part of students' lives and enhanced students learning process.

The CLIL movement gains momentum, professional learning communities are also growing to meet emerging professional needs and it is all eased by the Internet. [2] Therefore, in 2015 the Language Centre of the EASS coordinated a 1 year international Nordplus funded CLIL project 'Integrated Language Teaching in the Field of Cross-border Security' (ILTICS), which goal was to create CLIL network as well as to enhance and raise CLIL awareness among language teachers and certainly among content teachers internationally. Visits to project partner institutions, CLIL theoretical workshops and observation of CLIL classes, resulted in a list of recommendations for promoting CLIL to be more systematic and a part of curricula in all educational institutions.

3. Students' feedback on CLIL

In spring 2015 the Language Centre of the EASS carried out a short survey among the students and cadets of tertiary and vocational level. The sample consisted of those students and cadets who had experienced CLIL classes in that academic year. It was conducted in the form of a questionnaire which contained 8 questions:

- How do integrated classes differ from usual language classes?
- What did you like in integrated classes?
- What did you not like in CLIL classes?
- How did you benefit from CLIL classes?
- Which might hinder students' active participation in integrated classes?
- Which methods from the list below do you consider the most effective in CLIL classes:
Pairwork
Groupwork

Role plays
Dialogue
Seminar
Discussion
Presentation
Brainstorming
Individual work

- How did the integrated learning enhance your subject knowledge?
- How did the integrated learning improve your language skills?

The feedback was received from 94 cadets (vocational level) and 27 students (tertiary level).

First, the majority both at both levels considered the approach very useful and effective due to its practicality (eg real work related situations brought into classroom, simulation activities in true to life environment outside the classroom, true to life conference, ect).

As an extra advantage the respondents pointed out the tension in the learning environment (both subject and language teacher were present and gave feedback), everybody was involved, the learning process was more involving, learners could improve both their subject and language knowledge, instant feedback was given. Some more examples of the respondents' answers are given below:

- *Good practice of real work situations*
- *Trains practical language skills*
- *Provides practical experience*
- *It was fun*
- *Requires both subject and language knowledge simultaneously*
- *Gaining of more confidence*
- *Acquired more speciality knowledge*
- *Enhanced the whole learning process – ready for real life situations, etc.*

As for the methods (tabel 1), there were no drastic differences between the tertiary and vocational level, but still examples of some indifferences can be brought out. 76% of the cadets (vocational level) considered simulation roleplay as a very effective method, while surprisingly only 45% of the tertiary level students pointed it out. At the same time 18% of the students considered seminars more valuable and only 3,7% of the cadets thought the same. The difference could be justified by the level of studies (tertiary and vocational), i.e. cadets need more practical skills and when studying at tertiary level they need more debates and discussion in a express their opinion. In seminars they had to read an article of their professional field and debate on it.

At the same time 3 major drawbacks of CLIL classes were mentioned. Firstly, bad weather conditions (the activities were outside), resulting in demotivation, and secondly, poor language skills as being one of the main factors for full participation in the activities. Thirdly, lack of time was also mentioned, ie more time should have been allotted to CLIL activities in general. Disinterest towards the language (L2) was twice.

4. Conclusion

To conclude it can be stated that despite the difficulties in the process of the implementation and application of CLIL, a lot has been accomplished within the five years, for instance raising CLIL-awareness among content teachers, approval and support from the administration, international projects, e-learning CLIL materials and networking.

Moreover, the students survey also supports the application of CLIL at both tertiary and vocational level, due to its practicality, true to life simulations and possibility to apply several competences simultaneously including instant feedback. One of the biggest weakness of the effectiveness of CLIL is poor language level as it limits the ability to cope in the classroom and outside.

Therefore, there is still work to be done for delivering the concept of CLIL to the academic staff, as well as the curricula need to be combined and bound, where CLIL is systematically integrated from the beginning of studies which also enhances students' better acquisition of foreign languages.

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