



Teachers' Background and Attitudes towards CLIL in Secondary Education¹

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Abstract

The ability to express and communicate appropriately in English has become an imperative requirement in society, which is typified by internationality and mobility across countries. Within this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) emerges in European education as an effective method to enhance and reinforce students' competence in English and skills while covering traditional content areas. This paper presents a research study into CLIL in secondary education in Spain, specifically in the Alcaatén region, which is located in Castellón in the Valencian Community. For the evaluation of this, the first aim of the research work comprises determining whether or not any of the content subjects in the four secondary schools of the area are being delivered using English as the vehicular language. Secondly, the study also seeks to identify which are the attitudes and background of both English and content teachers of those centres in relation to CLIL. In order to do so, two types of CLIL questionnaires were distributed among the English and content teachers. Results reveal that CLIL has not been introduced in any of the four schools, even though two of them have applied it to some modules of nursery and primary education. Besides, results also indicate that both English and content teachers show a positive attitude towards the effects that CLIL could have on students, and predisposition to cooperate in its implementation. However, only a small amount of them are willing to adopt CLIL.

1. Introduction

During the last few decades, European countries have experienced an increasing tendency to implement methodologies within their education systems that are based on bilingual or multilingual programmes. The main purpose of this policy is to promote and accelerate the acquisition of a complete linguistic competence in a foreign language through a permanent and constant contact with the language, which is no longer restricted to the traditional linguistic module [1].

One of the most widespread multilingual approaches that focus on the premise presented in the previous paragraph is the so-called Content and Language Integrated Learning (henceforth CLIL). According to Coyle et al. [2], CLIL can be defined as 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language'.

Therefore, this methodological approach offers the students not only the possibility of learning the contents of a specific module, such as History or Science, but also an evident improvement of language skills with an additional language [3]. What makes CLIL characteristic from other multilingual education approaches lies in the fact that the vehicular language corresponds to a foreign language, which is not common in the students' usual environment [4]. In spite of that, there are occasions in which the language used in the CLIL approach can be a community or heritage language [2].

It is important to point out that CLIL lessons do not aim to teach content concepts from a foreign language subject perspective. Thus, the target language also remains as an independent module in the curriculum that covers the traditional linguistic features, that is, grammar, vocabulary or communicative skills, among others (Wolff 2007) [5].

Moreover, the recent character of the CLIL approach in educational institutions has considerably limited the number of methodological and pedagogic resources available to teachers (Meyer 2010). Because of that, Coyle [6] proposes the 4Cs-Framework, which includes a combination of the

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necessary theoretical principles in order to plan CLIL lessons from a cohesive and integrative point of view. In particular, the 4Cs conventions are the following:

- a. Content: it refers to the individual acquisition of knowledge, understanding and development of the skills of a specific content subject that students are supposed to perform.
- b. Cognition: it is connected to the thinking processes that enable both concept learning and linguistic demands simultaneously.
- c. Communication: it is used to learn and reconstruct the input given as well as to interact in the foreign language within the learning context.
- d. Culture: it is essential in CLIL because it makes students aware of the relationship between languages, cultures, history and themselves.

Following the search for effective CLIL programmes, Navés [7] establishes a set of parameters and conditions that should be followed so as to develop adequate CLIL policies. Firstly, the learners' culture and L1 need to be respected, since they represent a significant influence in the foreign language learning. Secondly, teachers in charge of the CLIL instruction are required to be bilingual or multilingual and completely trained, and it is convenient that they hold a stable position within the educational institution. Thirdly, the target language should be integrated and contextualised within the classroom. Additionally, students' parents need not only to be implicated and support the CLIL implementation, but also to collaborate with teachers. Finally, assessment and materials utilised when dealing with CLIL contexts have to be planned carefully. Another decisive aspect that needs to be taken into account when implementing CLIL programmes successfully lies in the fact that teachers are required to be teachers of both language and content simultaneously [8].

2. Method

The purpose of this research consists in the analysis of the CLIL situation in four secondary education schools in Castellón (Spain) and the evaluation of the teachers' opinions about this methodological approach. The participants of the study were required to fill in a specific questionnaire according to their speciality. Because of that, two different models of the questionnaire were created: one for English teachers and one for content teachers.

3. Results

At first, it is convenient to note on the difference in CLIL knowledge between English and content teachers. While a 77.8% of the former were able to identify the meaning of CLIL, only 42.3% of the later could. This fact might be seen as a consequence of the linguistic orientation of the CLIL methodological approach, since it is prevalent a research topic in applied linguistics. The present study revealed that two out of the four schools examined have introduced CLIL in some of their nursery or primary education subjects with the English teachers counselling, which appears to be decisive in the correct CLIL implementation. Therefore, focusing on one of the aims of the research, that is, determine whether CLIL is offered in secondary education in this region, it can be asserted that none of the schools have followed that path, even though it could be introduced in the future through a progressive implementation. Nevertheless, despite forming part of the centre curriculum, it is interesting to underline that only two out of the five content teachers interviewed from the *Colegio Puértolas Pardo* (primary and secondary school) were aware that the centre offered a subject through CLIL. That could be an after effect derived from a not well-planned organisation among the different departments of the centre. Examining the participants' competence in English, the majority of content teachers, a 92.3%, affirmed that they did not possess the necessary linguistic confidence so as to face a CLIL subject. Also, the 66.7% of English teachers and the 100% of content teachers agreed on the evidence that students are not currently prepared to succeed in a CLIL environment. This was probably an expected result, which was clearly diagnosed as one of the main drawbacks of implementing CLIL in schools [3]. Students from the institutions examined tend to present a level of English that varies from A1 to B1. Consequently, classrooms ranging between A2 and B1 would be the most suitable ones for introducing CLIL. However, that recognised absence of English proficiency in students may not be seen as a determinant condition not to endeavour to develop CLIL, since the low English proficiency is relatively standardised within the Spanish schools, including those where CLIL has been established. What appears to be clear is that CLIL is a methodological approach that fosters English language learning and communicates competences, which was indicated by 88.9% of English teachers coincided in stating and corresponds to one of its main objectives, as argued by Lorenzo et al. (2009). Even with that, results suggested that content teachers would have to overcome



several difficulties in order to conduct their lessons through a proper CLIL methodology. In particular, all the participants from content areas expressed that they would reduce the rhythm of the CLIL class due to i) the general low aptitude in English of both students and teachers, ii) the specificity of vocabulary, iii) linguistic difficulties that would combine with the usual content difficulties, and iv) the absence of methodology preparation. In general terms, English and content teachers concurred that obstacles would be related to the content and interaction vocabulary, and the expressions required to explain, summarise and solve doubts. Apart from that, content teachers also made reference to difficulties resulting from the low level of students and when writing English, whereas its English counterparts emphasised the complication of creating specific materials adapted to CLIL. Referring to that, it has to be said that the 55.6% of English teachers would be willing to collaborate with content teachers and develop CLIL materials. On the contrary, there was a higher proclivity of content teachers, a 73%, which would cooperate with English teachers, even though only a 19.2% of them believed that CLIL could be implemented in their subjects. Both teachers' predisposition towards working on CLIL materials together with colleagues from other departments can certainly be regarded as a positive fact, considering that team teaching is indispensable when adopted a CLIL methodological approach. Bearing in mind the results discussed above, the participants in the research attempted to compile the advantages and disadvantages of CLIL in the last part of the research throughout two different ways: English teachers took into account their personal opinion and content teachers analysed the benefits and weaknesses that CLIL would have in their particular subject. Specifically, the advantages stated by both types of teachers include improvement in the level of English, possible development of oral skills, and expansion of vocabulary. English teachers also signalled the access to resources in English and the possibility of using the linguistic components acquired through CLIL when travelling abroad. In contrast, disadvantages of CLIL according to the English and content teachers interviewed encompass excessive focus only on the linguistic side of the subject, no awareness of the technical terms in the students' own language and no acquisition of contents in students with a low level of English. Lastly, content teachers emphasised the absence of CLIL materials, and the insecurity and deceleration of the rhythm of the subject caused by their poor English knowledge. Taken into consideration the negative aspects of CLIL discussed in the previous paragraphs, it is fundamental to emphasise that some of them could be partially resolved if improved English training was offered to content teachers and the English curriculum was reinforced from early stages of education, so students would be linguistically capable to face CLIL lessons.

5. Conclusion

The multilingual condition of Europe and its members together with the current tendency of globalisation and mobility have originated an increasing development of CLIL in many countries. Besides, it has been proved that CLIL benefits and bolsters learners' foreign language skills as well as motivation and attention. Nonetheless, the correct implementation of CLIL implies reinforcement in areas such as teacher training, team teaching, education and assessment planning, and additional resources. All this considered, the purpose of the present paper was twofold: On the one hand, it aimed to determine whether CLIL was undertaken in the four secondary schools of the region. On the other hand, it concentrated on the English and content teachers' background and attitudes towards the CLIL methodological approach and its possible future implementation in their centres. Regarding the first issue, it can be concluded that none of the centres analysed has introduced CLIL in secondary education. Hence, CLIL might be transferred to secondary education in these Catholic funded schools in the near future throughout a progressive implementation. Dealing with the second objective of the study, the most significant findings demonstrated that the majority of English and content teachers agreed with the fact that CLIL would be positive for the students' foreign language skills and asserted that they would be willing to collaborate among them. Still, in their views, there are determining aspects to overcome before the application of CLIL as, for instance, the poor linguistic capacity of teachers and students, the absence of adapted materials and assessment, or the government involvement.



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