



CLIL – Potential Way of Enhancing Internationalization of Higher Education in Diverse Context

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Abstract

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) has been used for longer than two decades on Primary and Secondary level of education to foster language competence in a foreign language using professional register. Many studies have been devoted to CLIL issues and investigated CLIL impact on students' performance both in the foreign language and in content. A lot of research has been done on teachers involved in CLIL application into education. There is also a call for unifying and standardizing CLIL to help teachers and schools to start CLIL implementation. The term "CLIL pedagogy" has also appeared.

Our contribution deals with recently finished ERASMUS+ project focusing on finding good CLIL practice in different countries in Europe across Primary and Secondary sector. We have 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. This paper also illustrates CLIL and its potential in Higher Education from internationalization process perspective. According to our experience some proposals how to apply CLIL in Higher Education are described.

Keywords: CLIL, foreign languages, diversity, Higher Education, internationalization

1. Introduction

Investment in an education of young generation and training of teachers in order to achieve better language skills development is essential to boost their growth and competitiveness. The recommendations outlined in the document *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* include new criteria of learning foreign languages that are based on a dual approach with the aim that 15- year-olds should attain the level of the independent users of a first foreign language by the year 2020 and pupils in lower secondary education should study at least two foreign languages [1]. Based on this document and the document *Education and Training in Europe 2020* [2] which describes diverse policy initiatives targeting young people under the age of 34 and highlights that "Foreign languages skills can enhance the employability of young people", we believe that teaching and learning foreign languages may be achieved with the help of innovative methods, including Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) where non-language subjects are taught through the medium of a foreign language.

2. The Project Outlines

Recently finished ERASMUS+ project, which focused on implementation of CLIL methodology in primary and secondary schools in respective countries, was based primarily on these two documents. The project entitled "Transnational Exchange of Good CLIL Practice among European Educational Institutions" was approved by the Slovak National Agency in July 2015 with a participation of five European countries – Slovakia (coordinator), Lithuania (primary and secondary school), Latvia (Education department at Daugavpils Municipality), Sweden (upper-secondary school), and Italy (secondary school), set up the following objectives:

- Setting up essential components of good CLIL practice in the classroom by face-to-face observations,
- Preparing a modular e-training course for European CLIL teachers,
- Providing countries with none or less CLIL experience with the essential training and learning opportunities so that they can commence implementing this approach in their schools,
- Training teachers from the project partner countries on CLIL,

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- Setting up an open database of class recordings and other teaching and methodological materials for CLIL teachers,
- Collecting research data and conducting a comparative analysis of CLIL practice.

Specified goals led to the answer for a crucial question of the whole project – *What is a good CLIL practice?* Conducting a comparative analysis of a good CLIL practice preceded a document analysis of National curricula of particular countries in order to find out whether:

- CLIL is as a part of their national curricula,
- CLIL is a compulsory or optional way of teaching foreign languages,
- there is a willingness of stakeholders, teachers, learners and parents to educate or be educated through CLIL

Moreover, we have carried out the observation of CLIL classes in all participating countries to find out whether the context for CLIL implementation is the same or comparable. CLIL lessons in particular countries were observed by the project participants, i.e. each lesson was observed by at least 3 to maximum 7 people from several countries. Observations were carried out in the period from February 2016 until February 2017. The observation sheets consisted of the open questions concerning the following areas:

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

2.1 The Project Outcomes

The document analyses show that there are several good CLIL practices due to the diversity of historical, economic, national, and educational contexts. It has been proven that there is not just one good CLIL practice, despite researchers call for unification of its implementation.

Out of all participating project partners, only Italian *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca* (MIUR) introduced CLIL into the Italian school system as mandatory in *licei* and *istituti tecnici* in 2010 [3]. MIUR has specified the parameters of CLIL courses for teachers willing to learn more about CLIL methodology [4], teachers' competences in foreign languages which should be at least C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference, as well as specifications for students in all lyceums and technical institutes, where CLIL has been embed. Subjects which can be taught through the CLIL methodology in the fifth year of all lyceums and technical schools are the following ones: History, Geography, Philosophy, Math, Physics, Natural Sciences, Art History, Physical Education, and Religion.

A bilingual education in Latvia, another project partner, has been developing very quickly due to the State Programme of Latvian Language Acquisition, presented by the Latvian Language Agency, which dates back to 1st November 1995 [5]. The Agency supports the preparation of teacher-trainers, the development of future plans in a bilingual education, as well as the programme of sustainability. As of 2006, the Agency has been developing the professional development programme for CLIL teacher-trainers, teachers, and materials for students in cooperation with the British Council using the experience of bilingual education. They offered in 2006 – 2017 the further education for teachers willing to achieve CLIL methodology, including:

- Professional development programme with masterclasses – 36 hours
- Professional development programme 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 obviously 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. It is organised as an optional lesson, after classes.



The most sceptical partner, in the beginning of running the project, was Sweden. They had doubts that they would ever utilize the CLIL methodology 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 [6]. Therefore, there is disbelief that it could increase students' foreign language skills as they are exposed to English outside the school a lot. In spite of the fact that CLIL is not directly endorsed in 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 programmes or CLIL ones [7]. Our partner, finally, appreciated their involvement in the project because they found the CLIL methodology an effective method for teaching not only their students with lower communication skills, but mainly refugees with the aim to make them familiar with the Swedish language.

In 2001, the Ministry of Education in Lithuania, initiated the bilingual education as a part of the educational reform. A year later, the CLIL methodology was introduced to 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 European Union, have been carried out in Lithuania, but findings revealed the lack of systematic approach towards the implementation of CLIL in Lithuania [8]. Therefore, British Council together with the Ministry of Education and Science organized events aiming at teacher trainings throughout the country in 2006 with a focus on the development of teaching content through the medium of English. The main outcomes of all meetings included:

- a development of teaching resources,
- an increase in methodology and content knowledge,
- a development of schools' and teachers' network,
- a gaining more experience in CLIL.

Nowadays, CLIL is offered as an optional lesson in some Lithuanian schools mostly in a tandem mode, it means that both content and language teachers are available at lessons. Most of them are provided in a soft version, except Information technology and Science, which are taught in a hard version.

The aim of observations of CLIL classes was to study and compare the practical implications of CLIL in the project countries. The CLIL methodology was perceived positively from the point of view of teachers, pupils, parents, and institutions in all involved countries. Practically, all principles and models of CLIL were adapted to the educational, institutional and personnel contexts of the particular countries. The positive sides were visible in 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 with the project work, discussions and role plays engaging and activating the pupils aiming towards 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 in order to motivate the learners. All in all, we can say that CLIL was adjusted to teachers' possibilities, educational background and learners' language proficiency.

The mentioned project proved that the unification of CLIL – as a model applicable for any educational institution in any country – is unreachable due to different historical, economic, national, and educational contexts. On the other hand, we may consider it an advantage that it is not a rigid set of rules, but rather a holistic approach to education itself.

3. CLIL in Higher Education

The outcomes and experience from the mentioned project need paradigm shifts in acquiring the CLIL methodology. 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 programmes for future teachers. There are several reasons why to undertake this mission. One of them is a globalisation that has an impact on the higher education sphere too. The most noticeable impact can be observed in the increasing importance dedicated to the internationalisation process. The desire to gain international visibility has led universities to bolster the use of English as a lingua



franca at all their institutional activities, but above all in research and teaching levels. English is considered to play a leading role, which is why universities seem to be compelled to offer English-medium instruction (EMI henceforth) not only in Europe, but also in many other parts of the world. Currently, if a university is to be regarded as a truly international, it is urged to recruit students from a wide range of nationalities and English is widely believed to help pave the way for this internationalisation process [9]. The authors also state that EMI tends to be a top-down initiative. It is estimated that only 2% of the total students' population in Europe are enrolled in EMI initiatives. Above all, most of these EMI programmes are at master levels. According to the survey "English-Taught Programmes (ETP henceforth) in European Higher Education" [10], the numbers of identified ETPs went up from 725 programmes in 2001, to 2,389 in 2007 and to 8,089 in the present study. In 2007, only between 2.1% and 6.8% of all these programmes were taught in English; and enrolment in ETPs amounted to just between 0.7% and 1.4% of enrolment in all programmes. Despite the remarkable growth of ETPs, only a small proportion of students across Europe are enrolled in ETPs (1.3% of total student enrolment in the countries covered, which translates into an estimate of 290,000 students in the academic year 2013/14). Overall, 27% of the Higher Education Institutions addressed in the study offered at least one ETP and about 6% of all study programmes estimated are provided exclusively in English.

The European Commission in the report [11] states that there are two outstanding factors that hinder the internationalisation of curriculum in Higher Education. One of them is low motivation of educators to conduct courses in English, unless some kind of incentive is given to them. In the report – The Bologna Process of European Higher Education Area [12] – three most common obstacles perceived preventing students mobility were reported by the countries involved: lack of funding, language issues and lack of information and encouragement.

Based on this study research, we consider implementing the CLIL methodology to Higher Education a reasonable way how to eliminate mentioned obstacles.

3.1 CLIL Cells in Higher Education

As it was mentioned several times in the contribution diversity in education systems and contexts is wide and we think that is even wider when we consider education on Tertiary level. Enormous number of different study programmes provided in variety of languages included English taught programmes by the established universities and colleges around the world demonstrates the power of diversity.

To prepare young generation for the diverse world in labour market we- in academia – should be ready to work in multidisciplinary teams as it is being done in global companies. Trans-disciplinary cooperation external and internal ones might be a good way how to implement English into education on Tertiary level/in Higher education. To enhance the process of internationalisation several factors, variables should be considered before going international/multilingual at universities [13]. Main stakeholders involved in Higher education are students and teachers/researchers who should be prepared for English-Taught programmes before being forced to do that. In our Faculty (MTF STU in Trnava, Slovakia) within an institutional project we are studying teachers' attitudes to teaching academic courses in English and at the same time their readiness from linguistic perspective. We are planning to build multidisciplinary CLIL cells where teaching staff will be trained both linguistically and didactically to launch their courses in English step by step. ESP teachers will be members of this CLIL cell teams to assist other teachers with preparing the courses in English. As our students are not enough prepared to study in English, we decided to apply CLIL to prepare also them for deeper internationalisation of education process in our Faculty. CLIL as an umbrella approach for integrating content and language seems to be the way for achieving the goals of the Bologna process [14] We hope, that the cooperation in multidisciplinary CLIL cell teams in our Faculty will lead us to external multidisciplinary work.

4. Conclusion

These days we do not meet the expectations by EU Commission regarding the level of internationalization in Higher Education. We think that closer cooperation between ESP teachers and teachers of other academic courses can help. We find English as a tool for communication, but not all people who know the tool can use it for other purposes – in our case to teach academic courses. Imagine that university has a perfect lab with new and advanced technology but nobody was trained to use it practically for teaching. The tool itself cannot make a great teaching environment. The well-trained and prepared staff can. In the education context where students and some of the academic staff are not ready to English taught courses should be trained and assisted. We find CLIL adequate



approach to teach foreign language and content at the same time not only for Primary and Secondary level of education but also to enhance the internationalization process in Higher Education.

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