



# The Usage of Online Tools in Teaching Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to Pre-service Teachers

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## Abstract

*The world is undergoing rapid changes concerning the development in science, knowledge, and technology. The change can be seen in educational environment as the past months changed the teaching mode from face-to-face teaching to distance teaching. The students as well as the teachers had to adapt to challenges that the pandemic has brought to educational environment. The present study focuses on the development of digital skills of pre-service teachers (11, F=10, M=1), as well as on the usage of online tools in content and language integrated learning. Students were introduced to online tools, which can also be used for creating stories, and how they can be integrated to CLIL lessons. The research also includes pre-service teachers' experiences with the tools during the course, as well their experiences from the teaching practice.*

**Keywords:** CLIL, online tools, stories, pre-service teachers

## 1. Introduction

The last year brought a lot of changes to the educational environment. Not only teachers, but also students underwent some difficulties within the teaching and learning, especially during the past few months of pandemic. Teachers learnt to use online tools for teaching and students became more independent, moreover, both (teachers and students) became more literate regarding the technology. Both, teachers, and students, did not have enough time to prepare for the educational environment to shift into an online platform. For the most of them, it was a rapid change from day to day. Therefore, it is important to prepare pre-service teachers for the possibility of teaching in online space, so they can provide their students with a good education and most importantly, enjoy the process of teaching so they would not burn out.

## 2. Literature review

Technology is important in both personal as well as in professional lives. Nowadays, it plays very important role in educational environment. However, "technology in language teaching is not new. Computer-based materials for language teaching, often referred to as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), appeared in the early 1980s" [1] (p. 7). What is new for the students, as well for the teachers, is the fact that the whole education has been shifted from the classroom to internet. Online classrooms became more challenging, and it has shown the need for professional development in using internet and online tools for the teachers. Pre-service teachers create important group of students as in the future it will be them, who will educate next generations.

As Cimermanová (2009) states, it is essential to state that "if we want teachers to use technologies in their classroom they should become familiar with them as soon as that they could personally assess and evaluate, based on their own experience the positive and negative aspects, advantages and disadvantages in using them in a classroom" [2] (p. 116). Moreover, if the pre-service teachers have negative experiences with using online tools during their studies, they will probably not use them as teachers and vice versa. One of the possibilities how to form a positive relationship between using online tools and students is to show them the positive effect online tools have, as well, to teach students how they work. The technology should be used in both, language, and content classrooms. The unique combination of language and content is CLIL (Content and language integrated learning). CLIL teachers tend to spend more time on planning the CLIL lesson and language and subject teachers need to work closely so they ensure the appropriate content, and level of foreign language of the planned lesson. Double-major pre-service teachers represents a group where one teacher is as well as content, and language teacher. The research, by M. Sepešiová (2017), focused on the support of pre-service teachers' understanding of CLIL concluded that "as to students' reactions, analysis of their questionnaires revealed that most of them found the experience positive and their understanding of CLIL increased" [3] (p.157). Therefore, it is important not only to help students to understand the



CLIL methodology, but also to show pre-service teachers tools that they can use for creating CLIL lessons.

In addition, stories also form a link between the subject and the content, and its advantages should not stay unnoticed. The course therefore aimed to show students the online tools that can be used for creating stories, as well as, for using stories in CLIL lessons. G. Ellis and J. Brewster (2012) listed reasons, why the teachers should use stories during the lesson, and some of them are: stories are motivating, they help students develop their imagination, the repetition in the stories help students acquire the knowledge in natural way. E. Watts (2017) adds that stories help teachers explain and students to understand abstract terms.

The analysis of available research focused on the target area showed that the authors agree on the fact that there is a need for teachers to introduce and explain CLIL methodology to pre-service teachers, to help them understand what CLIL is. The analysis also highlighted the importance of development of technological skills that also need to be taught to pre-service teachers.

### **3. Methodology**

Research sample was made of 11 (F=10, M=1) pre-service teachers. The course aimed to introduce various online tools that can be used either in e-learning, or blended learning to pre-service teachers, more specifically, to support CLIL methodology.

The course lasted for 13 weeks, where students were introduced to online tools that could be used for online learning, as well as they can be adapted and used for CLIL lessons. The meetings were held once in a week for 90 minutes and the students were introduced to the various online tools. The course focused on the stories as a link between subject and language within one lesson. Within the 13 weeks of summer term, students also had a teaching practice. The teaching practice lasted 2 weeks and it was focused on primary school students and all online teaching tools were introduced to the pre-service teachers before the teaching practice, so they could use them during the teaching practice. Moreover, students were supported and encouraged to use CLIL methodology during the practice.

The main research tools were questionnaire and group interview. The questionnaire was made from 22 questions, it was also focused on the course itself as well on the relevance of the online tools that were introduced to the pre-service teachers. The questionnaire and the interview were in the mother tongue of the students, so they can express their opinions and ideas as precisely as possible. Most of the questions were in the form of rating scale questions and students were supposed to express how useful each online tool was. The interview was in the form of a group interview. It was an unstructured interview as it was focused on the teaching practice and students' experiences, moreover, their experiences with the online tools that they used during the teaching practice.

### **4. Research and its results**

The first tools that was introduced to students were Pixton and Comicmaster. Both online tools are used for creating comics. Students' task was to choose their favourite fairy tale and put it into modern setting. Students were also asked to think about the activities they can use during the CLIL lesson with the usage of Pixton, or Comicmaster. During the interview, students expressed that it was difficult to use Comicmaster, as that online tool is not as supported as is Pixton. Therefore, most of the students chose to work with Pixton. Students also expressed that it was more fun to work with pixtion, and that they as well enjoyed it more. Both online tools help students to develop their creativity as well as their critical thinking, as they had to evaluate the options and chose the one that would suit the best within the context they chose; moreover, the tools also supported digital literacy of the students.

Canva is online tool that can be used for creating worksheet, during the course, it was used for creating CLIL books. Students worked in groups and their task was to create a book, which can be used on CLIL lessons. The books created by students were inspired by the story dices, which was one of the tools that was taught to the students. At the end of the lessons, the students shared their stories and exchanged ideas for improvement. Students consider Canva as a useful tool, moreover, the students also expressed that they could imagine using the tool in all parts of the lesson. Students were given one more task in Canva, and it was creation of CLIL books, and double major students focused on their second subject.

The tool that stuents enjoyed the most while working with it was Toontastic. Toontastic is an application that helps to create short videos/films. Toontastic presents an easy way to work with online tool, as well it also encourages creativity of the students. It can be used for various purposes, students can start learning the story parts, as at the beginning of the creation the application asks the user whether she/he wants to create short story, classic story, or science report. The students expressed



that Toontastic is very useful tool and that they enjoyed working with the application. However, there was one student, who considered Toontastic as very difficult application to use. Students also suggested that they would use the tool in groups and ask students to create a video in groups, so the characters can have different voices, and, in this way, it might be more interesting.

Pre-service teachers were introduced to more online tools that can help with the preparation for CLIL lesson, as well, the tools that can be used in distance learning and will make the education process easier for both, the students, and teachers. For this paper, only those tools that students appreciated the most are subject of this paper.

## 5. Conclusion

During the group interview, pre-service teachers expressed that the course was very beneficial and that it showed them new possibilities of teaching in online space. As Erdem (2019) claims, even though the students are fluent users of technology they have problems to engage with it more deeply and therefore they are understood as digital immigrants and the course aimed to help students to engage with the online tools deeper, so they become digital natives in this area. During the final interview, students expressed that they enjoyed working with new tools and that they became more literate. Some students also used the tools during their teaching practice and reflected that it was helpful and that their students responded very well, they were active during the classes, moreover, they wanted to participate in the activities that pre-service teachers prepared. The pre-service teachers also expressed that the tools made their preparation for the classes easier and that their lessons were more attractive to students. None of the students used CLIL methodology during the teaching practice, as it is not a methodology that is being used commonly in the Slovakia educational environment.

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