

## STATE OF THE CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) IMPLEMENTATION IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

The following article collects information on current experience and state of the art of CLIL methodology in vocational schools across selected countries of the Central Asia, namely Uzbekistan. Relevant issues, both general and country-specific, are outlined. The analysis suggests that CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is the natural ally of vocationally-oriented education, therefore all attempts to introduce CLIL into vocational schools' classrooms should be valued.

**Key words:** vocational schools, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), foreign language teaching, bilingual education.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been a tremendous success story and its influence on educational processes is currently expanding quickly across Central Asia and beyond. One of the available definitions describes CLIL as: “a dual- focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language”. More generally, we could say that it is the integration of learning a foreign language with learning some other content. Moreover, students are expected to focus on the content or information rather than on a linguistic syllabus<sup>1</sup>.

Research carried out in recent years has shown that knowledge of foreign languages is recognized as a key competency in the labour market. It is therefore obvious that vocational schools should focus on improving the language skills of pupils in order to meet the obligation to prepare young people for work, especially in the context of the globalization process. This should apply not only to individual professions or professional fields, but also to professions in the field of healthcare, social services, hospitality, industry, technology, business or administration. Content and Language Integrated Learning enables vocational schools to meet the needs of the economy by improving general and specialist language skills of employees, as well as by increasing the competences of professionally active people<sup>2</sup>.

Acquiring subject knowledge is not enough, learners have to understand the subject matter, develop thinking skills (cognition) and gain conceptual understanding. But in order to construct an understanding, to develop cognition, the linguistic demands must be defined and met. Each step towards cognitive progression according to Bloom's Taxonomy demands specific linguistic means which the learners have to master and which have to be supplied by the teacher. Therefore, the teachers have to be aware what the learners need in order to develop cognition and expand their conceptual understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Bloom B. (1984), The 2 Sigma Problem: The Search of Methods of Group Instruction as Effective as One-to-One Tutoring, Educational Researcher, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 4–16.

<sup>2</sup> Borg S. (2014), British Council Regional Policy Dialogues 2013–14, online: <https://bit.ly/2Konyve>.

Integrated language teaching is required for stimulating students' subject-specific language development. This means that subject teachers integrate language and content learning while teaching their subject. This is in line with the ideology in English vocational education that part of students' language education takes place in subject-specific education and is related to the context of the vocational practices. In the context of English vocational education, language is increasingly considered as an important cognitive tool that has an essential role in the development of students' vocational knowledge. In recent years improving students' English language proficiency has been a priority for English schools, since in 2010 national language standards have been laid down by law and students' achievements were measured by standardised tests. This resulted in renewed attention for teaching English in vocational education, with a particular focus on providing English lessons and remedial teaching and testing students' general language skills as set out in the national language standards. While the specific assessment standards per vocational programme also describe linguistic elements of that particular vocational practice. These elements are often being overlooked by subject teachers. Subject teachers prefer to leave the responsibility for students' language development to the language teachers and sometimes even consider language teaching to be of secondary importance. However, it is equally important that subject teachers contribute to their students' language development in their lessons. Vocationally oriented language skills are essential for students in preparation for their participation in the occupational practice<sup>3</sup>.

CLIL offers the potential to enhance the individual capabilities of students with respect to the learning of new foreign languages and content subjects and contributes to the build-up of a positive "can-do" attitude among said students. It can be said, therefore, that CLIL combines the benefits of LSP with those of a functional-bilingual education. CLIL has the potential to increase student motivation and its context dependence makes it naturally infused with cultural components. This causes students to not only better understand a particular foreign culture, but also to develop an increased cultural awareness by observing the relationships between a language and the society that uses said language. What is more, the skills and knowledge that students acquire, in particular in a VET context, is likely to increase the student's chances on the job market. As noticed by Nawrot-Lis, there is a natural relationship between various CLIL models and vocational training, both in terms of their emphasis on practical application and the promotion of multilingualism<sup>4</sup>.

The present research consists of a series of surveys that have been conducted by each national team participating in the Erasmus+ CLIL-VET project (Poland, Austria, Spain, and Romania). Online questionnaires were distributed among a variety of schools, all specializing, or teaching, a vocational-subject. All of the teachers participating in the study were asked to answer twenty one online questions. A five-point Likert scale has been applied for the majority of the questions. The remaining questions were either "open-ended" or "yes/no" questions.

Our teams did not manage to acquire a sufficient number of respondents to warrant parametric tests for every variable tested and the statistical power of some of the tests might also be put into question. Furthermore, due to limited availability of respondents due to sampling procedures, typical of regular large-scale studies, were also not an option. Accordingly, for the sake of methodological rigor, scientific integrity, and to ensure a correct interpretation of the results to be reported below, it must be stated explicitly at this point that the current study explores its object exclusively in a declarative fashion, meaning that certain aspects might have been over- or underreported due to individual bias of the respondents.

Prior language knowledge does not seem to influence a teacher's willingness to commit to learning a new language. It is likely that this is due to professional requirements, seeing as all CLIL-VET

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<sup>3</sup> Byram M. (2000), Assessing intercultural competence in language teaching, *Sprogforum*, Vol. 18, No. 6, pp. 8–13.

<sup>4</sup> Cummins J. (2000), *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

teachers need to incorporate a notable FL component into their work. However, it must be noted that the surveyed teachers are, overall, unwilling to cooperate with their FL colleagues regardless of their prior foreign language knowledge.

As prior FL knowledge does not seem to influence the desire to use CLIL, there is a great need to develop and implement CLIL-VET courses designed not only for teachers who already know foreign languages, but also those who do not speak/use such languages<sup>5</sup>.

CLIL, as an idea, appears to be sufficiently popularized within the teaching community in general. One can surmise that this is due to the fact that teachers make consistent efforts to stay up to date with the current state of the art.

All surveyed teachers, regardless of age, consider CLIL to be an important and pedagogically valuable teaching method.

#### Cross-Country Comparisons

Teachers from Romania rate their frequency of FL use higher than their counterparts from the remaining countries surveyed. Teachers from Poland, Spain, and Austria rate this use similarly<sup>6</sup>.

Teachers from all of the countries surveyed do not differ in terms of how they rate the availability of foreign language training. All teachers clearly believe that there is a deficit in the availability of said training.

#### Conclusions

The analyses described above have led to a series of conclusions that merit further discussion. These conclusions are summarized below. The General Conclusions subsection applies to analyses performed on pooled data from all countries involved. The Cross-Country Comparison section, as the name implies, describe how the individual participating countries differ with respect to survey data.

#### General Conclusions

Even teachers with a modest knowledge of foreign languages acknowledge the fact that certain subject areas (or possibly entire subjects) are easier to teach in a foreign language rather than the native language of the students. This will most likely apply to the natural sciences, whose rapid development makes translation into national languages impractical.

While both FL speakers and non- FL speakers consider FLs to be significant tools to transmit knowledge, those teachers who do speak at least one foreign language on average rate the vehicular status of FLs as greater than their peers who not possessed of equivalent language skills. This would suggest that teachers who are not FL users may pay “lip service” to the concept of CLIL, simply due to its popularity. It is possible that more awareness raising is required to stimulate actual interest in CLIL within this group.

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<sup>5</sup> Coyle D. (2007), Content and language integrated learning: Towards a connected research agenda for CLIL pedagogies, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Volume 10, Issue 5, pp. 543–562.

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