

The Impact of CLIL on Improving Language Competences and Subject Matter

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to outline the importance and the impact of CLIL methodology from its initial idea where it was implemented. To see the outcome of this integrated approach versus the conventional way of learning, which later it turned to be so effective on language learning and acquisition. I will also include an example of my experience while teaching students some preparatory classes of IELTS exam in Albania through CLIL.

Key words: CLIL, methodology, subject, 4Cs pillar, approach, acquisition

A background to CLIL

The forces of global change such as socio-economic factor and the wide spread of new technologies have brought out rapid transformations and these meant that better educational systems were needed for a better access to language learning. All these contributed to the educational success of CLIL methodology standing for the content and language integrating learning outcomes performed in classes. Due to its potential and effective results in language competences we see this educational approach extended not only across countries but even continents and being embraced and applied by many schools worldwide. The advent of CLIL brought a significant development in the field of bilingual education in the 21 century. To aim informing and improvement from the 'traditional educational and pedagogical approach' by reorienting and merging a diversification of teaching methods in more contemporary ways.

The benefits of CLIL

As the definition of CLIL itself means ‘Content Language Integrated Learning’ it reflects a close integrated combination between subject, student, and language. The main distinction observed in CLIL methodology is the prior approach to content and language, by learning the content subject through language and parallel by mastering the language through the study of the content-based subject (Ruiz De Zarobe, 2008). When applying teaching through CLIL, the learners should have some basic skills of the language, and thus learning a second language supports and elevates the development of communication skills and literacy, as well as it improves cognitive skills in the areas of analysis and critical thinking. This methodology awards a contribution even for a better awareness of the mother tongue and the national and cultural background.

Among many scopes, the impact of CLIL highly develops intercultural communication skills. It provides opportunities to study content through different perspectives and also helps the learner improve a subject-specific language terminology and master the language competence overall in a higher level. These are also referred as the 4C’s of the pillar, respectively; Content, Cognition, Culture and Communication. (Cited in Meyer, 2010; Ruiz De Zarobe, 2013). The language is learned and perceived through the content matter which leads to communication and cognition while culture remains closely on top of these pillars as intercultural awareness is fundamental to CLIL. Correspondingly, it involves a deeper language understanding to put in use for specific goals in communication. It builds a synergy through the implementation of various new forms of practices in class and effective transfer of ideas from materials to the learner through the medium of CLIL approach.

Real-life situations and conducted research

For example, during my classes of teaching IELTS through CLIL combination, I have noticed that in the reading section for academic purposes students performed well with the reading comprehension of the passages and were able to master a specific vocabulary of technical and academic terms. As reading in itself is a complex and purposeful decoding process, these terms would also serve useful for students to put in their daily use of language. Secondly, these terms contributed to a higher vocabulary usage while speaking for different academic topics and thus composing writing tasks with appropriate and enriched terminology. Language skills simultaneously help each other in improvement and this proved better results when teaching was based on CLIL approach. Furthermore, this is also stated in a survey conducted in Germany by

Ergebnisse der DESIStudie. The research was conducted in the classes from grade nine and onwards and it showed that from 958 grade nine students from 38 classes, which had been learning through CLIL approach for at least four years, stated that those learning through CLIL program had a much better performance in all the aspects of the language assessment such as; pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, content, reading and listening comprehension, grammatical proficiency, writing and pragmatic competency than those learning with the traditional programs. The tests clearly showed that CLIL groups outperformed the non-CLIL groups. While those grades which had more than one subject taught through CLIL, obtained better results than the grades in one CLIL subject. The study concluded that CLIL was significantly much more effective in the language competences because the students scored higher in all the aspects of language learning than those in traditional way of learning. (Ergebnisse der DESIStudie, 2008) The evidence suggest that learners posses good command of technical vocabulary and the ability to produce extended arguments and ideas, not only single word responses. They feel confident about the words definition and speak coherently at some length with a self assurance and more engaged to the subject matter. This approach makes the learners feel more engaged in the language learning and the subject matter learning. They show up more active during classes and take a positive stand when performing real life situations gained from lessons. Another positive impact is that CLIL saves time while teaching other subjects through the medium of language and it meets students' needs by choosing and combining materials that meet their area of interest. A key factor is that tasks on CLIL combination allow an open design for different levels to adapt to each learner, but also, that expectations from the teachers are displayed clearly to each student. This is why CLIL is sometimes called a **dual-purpose** teaching because it can do a lot, increase desire, willingness and the ability to learn both the language and the specific subject area.

Conclusions

From all the study-cases and evidence shown, it draws the conclusion that CLIL students can reach significantly higher levels in mastering a foreign language than in conventional foreign language classes. It allows learners to build intercultural knowledge and understanding which develops their intercultural communication skills (Vujovic, 2011). It prepares them for practical life situations and work in a multicultural society. CLIL meant learning a language and

simultaneously another subject – learning a subject or more than one and simultaneously improving a foreign language and well mastering your mother time as well. Thus, establishing this qualitative and innovative approach brought innovative varied materials based on the 4Cs pillar, a successful CLIL teaching and learning process and gained so a considerable integration into curricula across countries.

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