

# Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a Post-modern Educational Paradigm

*Mushkudiani Zurab – Invited specialist; PhD, English Language Teacher, Department of Business Administration; Kutaisi City Council; Public Schools 3, 17, Akaki Tsereteli State University, Kutaisi, Georgia*

## Abstract

**Introduction and aim:** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an innovative approach, with full characteristics of dynamical and motivating forces. This method envisages teaching through a foreign language. It is internationally recognized pedagogical tool, which provides with special educational atmosphere for pupils.

In Georgia this issue with its complete components did not become a subject of research, however, its importance is recognized. It is clear that detection of foreign language learning individual peculiarities depends not only on the innate inclination, but But on the existing current trends too in the educational system. It is a timely challenge CLIL- method, which is recommended by the European Commission for use in all levels of education (Marsh D, 2002). This method implies simultaneously teaching content and foreign language. Then, when in Europe already there are 216 types of this teaching method (Coyle D, 2008) and even though, there is implementation potential theoretically, CLIL method In Georgia is not yet known and there is little experience of related researches.

**Research methodology:** The current state of CLIL- method, is studied:

- By observing of the learning process
- With teachers' interviews and students' survey;
- By intervention in integrated classes (natural and english language lessons in 5th class).

**Results and implications:** This study sought to address the following three key questions:

- How can schools and teachers be better prepared to use the CLIL approach to support Languages education in schools?
- What factors support or inhibit the implementation of Languages education using a CLIL approach in schools?
- Does the CLIL approach to languages learning improve student engagement and motivation in learning a language amongst students?

First, the need to establish and maintain strong and open lines of communication with parents and the wider school community. Second, the importance of engaging the support of the wider school context, although this needs to be distinguished from having to secure whole school commitment. That is, CLIL can be successful without having to impose significant demands or impositions on whole school structures.

**Conclusion:** To that end, this study makes the following four broad recommendations.

Establish a CLIL advisory/reference group (with inter-school networks), the group will aim to:

- grow programs and support quality teaching by facilitating teacher/school networks for professional learning, and
- monitor the needs of programs to identify and address emerging issues.

**Keywords:** content, English language, CLIL, integrated classes

## 1 Introduction and aim

**Introduction and aim** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become the umbrella term describing both learning another (content) subject such as natural sciences through the medium of a foreign language and learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject.

In ELT, forms of CLIL have previously been known as 'Content-based instruction', 'English across the curriculum' and 'Bilingual education'.

Even with English as the main language, other languages are unlikely to disappear. Some countries have strong views regarding the use of other languages within their borders.

CLIL is an acronym, and as such it tends to attract people's attention. If we were to ask the question 'What is subject teaching?' or 'What is language teaching?' we would probably be expecting more than four answers in response. But CLIL has been bold enough to encapsulate itself within an acronym, implying that it is an approach, a philosophy - an educational paradigm with frontiers that can be defined.

If we teach EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction), LAC (Language Across the Curriculum), CBI (Content-based Instruction) or CBLT (Content-based Language Teaching; if we work in Bilingual Education; if we're a subject teacher working through the medium of a foreign language, or a language teacher bringing in content into your English lesson, we work within the area of Content and Language Integrated Learning.

The acronym itself is a good one, because it is largely self-explanatory. Invented back in the mid-1990's, it seems to be passing the test of time. CLIL itself has been around for a long time - and was put into practice by ancient Roman upper-middle classes, who preferred to have their children educated in Greek. However, should we want to find definitions of modern CLIL, it is relatively easy to find them

CLIL has precedents in immersion programmes (North America) and education through a minority or a national language (Spain, Wales, France), and many variations on education through a 'foreign' language. Euro-funded projects show that CLIL or similar systems are being applied in some countries, but are not part of teacher-training programmes. There has been an increase in the number of schools offering 'alternative' bilingual curricula, and some research into training and methodology. Several major European organisations specialising in CLIL projects have emerged, including UNICOM, EuroCLIC and TIE-CLIL (see web references for details).

In the UK the incentive comes from the Content and Language Integration Project (CLIP) hosted by CILT, (the National Centre for Languages) which is the UK government's centre of expertise on languages. CILT monitors a number of projects covering the 7-16 age range and involving innovations in language teaching such as the integration of French into the primary curriculum. Other research is based at the University of Nottingham, while teacher training and development courses in CLIL are available through NILE (the Norwich Institute for Language Education).

With increased contact between countries, there will be an increase in the need for communicative skills in a second or third language.

Languages will play a key role in curricula across Europe. Attention needs to be given to the training of teachers and the development of frameworks and methods which will improve the quality of language education.

The European Commission has been looking into the state of bilingualism and language education since the 1990s, and has a clear vision of a multilingual Europe in which people can function in two or three languages.

## 1.1 Methodology of Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

is a term created in 1994 by David Marsh as a methodology similar to but distinct from language immersion and content-based instruction. It is an approach for learning content through an additional language (foreign or second), thus teaching both the subject and the language. The idea of its proponents was to create an "umbrella term" which encompasses different forms of using language as the medium of instruction.

CLIL is fundamentally based on methodological principles established by research on "language immersion". This kind of approach has been identified as very important by the European Commission because: "It can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills now, rather than learn them now for use later.

It opens doors on languages for a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education. It provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum, which can be of particular interest in vocational settings." This approach involves learning subjects such as history, geography or natural sciences, through an additional language. It can be very successful in enhancing the learning of languages and other subjects, and helping children develop a positive attitude towards themselves as language learners.

The European Commission has therefore decided to promote the training of teachers to "...enhancing the language competences in general, in order to promote the teaching of non-linguistic subjects in foreign languages".

Here's the simplest of all, from the European Commission itself: "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language..."

On this purely descriptive level, this quotation endorses CLIL as a construct - as a member of the Curricular Club. It seems uncontroversial because we do not know to what extent or to what level pupils 'learn a subject' through the foreign language, and we are left unaware of any reasons for doing CLIL.

The next one offers a more detailed description: "CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language." [1]

This quote is useful because it highlights some of the educational intention inherent to the CLIL paradigm. Through CLIL-type practice, one learns [subject] content whilst at the same time learning a foreign language. What could be better than this? The 'dual-focused' objective would seem to be implying that CLIL kills two birds with one stone.

If we return to the European Commission's quotation, and read a little further, we encounter the following phrase: "**It [CLIL] provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum**".

This would seem a good reason as any to promote an approach with a twin set of objectives. One of these objectives is clearly educational (to learn subject content and a foreign language) and the other is administrative. Since educational and administrative needs often fight for space, this seems a good way to promote peace between them. We were told in the European Council Resolution in 1995 that,

".....all EU citizens, by the time they leave compulsory schooling, should be able to speak two languages other than the mother tongue".

Curricula attempting to achieve this aim have been getting more and more desperate in their attempts to find timetabling space. What is the possible answer to this problem? Why CLIL, of course. Instead of studying Natural sciences in the majority language, do it in a foreign language. As long as it works, the pupils learn the same subject concepts and skills, but increase contact time with the foreign language - crucial consideration in the improvement of attainment levels.

The basis of CLIL is that content subjects are taught and learnt in a language which is not the mother tongue of the learners. Knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content. Language is integrated into the broad curriculum. Learning is improved through increased motivation and the study of natural language seen in context. When learners are interested in a topic they are motivated to acquire language to communicate. CLIL is based on language acquisition rather than enforced learning.

Language is seen in real-life situations in which students can acquire the language. This is natural language development which builds on other forms of learning. CLIL is long-term learning. Students become academically proficient in English after 5-7 years in a good bilingual programme. Fluency is more important than accuracy and errors are a natural part of language learning. Learners develop fluency in English by using English to communicate for a variety of purposes. Reading is the essential skill.

### ***1.1.1 Results and Implications***

**The advantages of CLIL:** CLIL helps to: Introduce the wider cultural context; Prepare for internationalisation; Access International Certification and enhance the school profile; Improve overall and specific language competence; Prepare for future studies and / or working life; Develop multilingual interests and attitudes; Diversify methods & forms of classroom teaching and learning; Increase learner motivation.

**CLIL in the classroom:** CLIL assumes that subject teachers are able to exploit opportunities for language learning. The best and most common opportunities arise through reading texts. CLIL draws on the lexical approach, encouraging learners to notice language while reading.

**The future of CLIL:** There is no doubt that learning a language and learning through a language are concurrent processes, but implementing CLIL requires a rethink of the traditional concepts of the language classroom and the language teacher. The immediate obstacles seem to be:

Opposition to language teaching by subject teachers may come from language teachers themselves. **Subject teachers may be unwilling to take on the responsibility.**

Most current CLIL programmes are experimental. There are few sound research-based empirical studies, while CLIL-type bilingual programmes are mainly seen to be marketable products in the private sector.

CLIL is based on language acquisition, but in monolingual situations, a good deal of conscious learning is involved, demanding skills from the subject teacher.

The lack of CLIL teacher-training programmes suggests that the majority of teachers working on bilingual programmes **may be ill-equipped** to do the job adequately.

There is little evidence to suggest that understanding of content is not reduced by lack of language competence. Current opinion seems to be that language ability can only be increased by content-based learning after a certain stage.

Some aspects of CLIL are unnatural; such as the appreciation of the literature and culture of the learner's own country through a second language.

Until CLIL training for teachers and materials issues are resolved, **the immediate future remains with parallel rather than integrated content and language learning**. However, the need for language teaching reform in the face of Europeanisation may make CLIL a common feature of many European education systems in the future.

If reading were the 'main' or 'essential' skill in CLIL, then CLIL would be an extremely dull paradigm, **methodologically** speaking. And of course, it isn't (dull). In fact the main reason why CLIL has taken off is because it forces people to extend their **methodological repertoire**, conditioned by the realisation that in a 2nd/3rd language, the kids might not understand you so well.

Text and reading strategies are no more or less important than in L1 teaching, but what you tend to find is that teachers (or CLIL authors) find a wider variety of ways to work on them. But speaking, listening and writing all involve 'text', and the multi-modal aspect of **post-modern classrooms** has extended the notion of 'text' massively - and the way that students approach them and respond to them. The idea of merely 'reading' in CLIL sounds terribly dull. It's not like that at all, and anyway, it depends (surely) on the type of subject you're talking about. There's much more 'reading' (in the traditional sense) in History than there is in Biology. But there's still 'text', yes. Phil Ball (Co-author of 'Putting CLIL into Practice', OUP 2015). [3]

Despite the self-explanatory nature of the phrase 'Content and Language Integrated Learning', the true nature of CLIL still remains elusive

**Now let's look at a different type of observation on CLIL. David Graddol wrote that CLIL is "...an approach to bilingual education in which both curriculum content (such as science or geography) and English are taught together. It differs from simple English-medium education in that the learner is not necessarily expected to have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study". [2]**

This suggests that CLIL is far from the innocent creature that we read about in the first quotation from the European Commission. Graddol suggests that a powerful element of CLIL is its role in the improvement of language skills, and that pupils do not necessarily need a particularly high level of foreign language attainment to do their 'CLIL-ing'. Now this sounds quite radical. Why?

Because the teachers would have to adjust their methodology to ensure that the students were understanding the content.

Teachers would not be able to simply 'transmit' the content, assuming that their audience understood. They would have to think of other means (group work, tasks, etc) which would result in an increase of the skill-based focus of the learning. [4]

The educational materials (textbooks) would also have to reflect this approach.

The pupils would be learning language that was more clearly focused on, and related to, the subject matter that they needed to learn.

CLIL is not confined to higher-achieving students. It is not an approach for the elite. It fits in perfectly with a mixed-ability philosophy.

Without going much further in this paper, we might say that the five or six phenomena described in the above are all desirable, in educational terms. Ensuring that students understand the content, reducing teacher-talk, increasing the focus on skills, influencing publishers to do likewise and getting students to learn language items that are always contextualised, always functionally necessary in the classroom - sound good at any level of curricular discourse. What is CLIL? Well already it looks as if it is something like 'good practice', and if we take Graddol at his word, it can be applied across the ability range.

In terms of existing contextual factors and sentiment, the introduction of such an approach seems timely, with solid and consistent levels of stakeholder support for CLIL across different groups. One particular factor that cannot be underestimated is that students, when questioned directly, indicate that they do take

Languages seriously. In contrast to public rhetoric and opinions sometimes presented in the popular media suggesting Languages are not an important part of students' school experience (e.g. Price, 2011), the findings from this study are firmly consistent with research elsewhere on students' perceptions of Languages in schools, which confirms students do value high quality, effective Languages programs (Lo Bianco & Aliani, 2008), and there is a need to address this gap. Furthermore, and perhaps of special importance given the context of the present study, students also believe that CLIL is a workable approach. As revealed in the survey data, they hold the view that through an integrated approach to instruction, it is possible to learn both language and content effectively.

Parents and principals are also supportive of Languages, desire high quality Languages programs, and believe that CLIL has potential. These levels of support were largely consistent irrespective of parents' own linguistic background, or principals' previous experiences of working with bilingual programs.

However, a caveat was also noted in terms of a need for strong and open lines of communication with parents and the wider school community. Although levels of parental support for CLIL remained consistent before and after the trial, they did report being less certain about the benefits of the approach at the end of the study. This could be related to a level of dissatisfaction also indicated by parents on the extent to which they had been kept informed of progress during the unit of work. This signals the significance of teachers having to communicate regularly with parents about CLIL programs. Although a whole school approach is not required to successfully deliver a CLIL program in terms of substantial commitment or wider school reform (discussed in more detail later), a strong profile within the school for the CLIL program would help to support teacher/parent communication and showcase the benefits of the program.

There also appeared to be some discrepancy between teachers' and principals' views on the perception of the CLIL approach among other teaching staff beyond the Languages area. Whereas teachers reported even higher levels of support from content teachers by the end of the trial, principals expressed possible concern about how the approach had been perceived by the broader school community. This difference seems to lie in the positive reception reported by teachers related specifically to non-language/content teachers with whom they collaborated closely in developing the CLIL program, compared to the wider teaching community within the school when taken as a whole (per the principal survey item).

As with parents, the implication here is the need for clear lines of communication beyond staff immediately involved in the program. This ensures those without direct involvement understand the nature and scope of the initiative, removing uncertainty around the perceived threat of CLIL. As implied by the content integrated dimension, CLIL has the potential to impact other curriculum areas. With immersion programs, the likelihood that it will impact other areas is very high, since at least 50% of the curriculum is being delivered in the target language (Baker, 2006). Even with compromises (e.g. reducing target language exposure to 25-30%, or 7.5 hours per week, under the Victorian Bilingual Schools Program), this still has a considerable effect on timetabling and other aspects of school organisation (recruitment, etc.) which, directly and indirectly, also impacts other teachers.

However, CLIL does not necessarily require whole school reorganisation or change. Rather, as demonstrated by the cases in this report, it can be done successfully by Languages teachers either working largely alone, or in small-scale partnerships with individual content teachers or classroom generalists. This mirrors the experience of CLIL elsewhere in that it can take multiple forms, without depending on whole school commitment (Mehisto et al., 2008). In this sense, it can be contained within the Languages program, while also having the potential to draw in other teachers as they desire, without necessarily having to impose whole school reform to achieve those goals.

To recapitulate, irrespective of setting, context, or language/content focus, all six trial schools were able to deliver CLIL programs that were overall valued by key stakeholders: teachers, students, principals, and parents. In this regard, the data speaks for itself: the CLIL framework does not present a source of problems for teaching Languages in Victorian schools. To the contrary, the CLIL approach was shown to be useful for helping teachers to work with content and languages successfully through an integrated pedagogical approach to enhance their Languages program. Using CLIL, teachers were able to:

a) use the 4Cs model to work with content and develop language/content integrated units of work, often in successful collaborative partnerships with others (including non-specialist language teachers, primary generalists, secondary content area specialists, and even external members of the community), and

b) use the 6 pedagogical principles to deliver the lessons effectively in classroom practice, formulating a range of strategies and techniques that led to the development of students' content knowledge and language skills.

### 1.1.2 **Conclusion:**

To that end, this study makes the following four broad recommendations.

1. Establish a CLIL advisory/reference group (with inter-school networks), the group will aim to: grow programs and support quality teaching by facilitating teacher/school networks for professional learning, and monitor the needs of programs to identify and address emerging issues. without having to impose significant demands or impositions on whole school structures.

In conclusion, what therefore becomes most significant in the context of the education system for the future success and expansion of CLIL seems two-fold:

1. Generating confidence in the CLIL approach
2. Developing and maintaining quality CLIL teacher professional learning and practice

Despite an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse community,

education system continues to default to the 'primacy of English' (Lo Bianco, 2003, p. 25)—and monolingual assumptions on literacy (Cross, 2009, 2011b)—with Languages still largely at the margins. This may be why, despite their overall support for CLIL, marked differences nevertheless remain between parents at primary and secondary levels, given the pervasive rhetoric on the importance of (English) literacy within the early years. A real difficulty for implementation and expansion will therefore lie in confidence that CLIL can actually be done. Although we now take for granted that Canadian immersion is by far one of the most successful approaches to language instruction ever attempted, when first trialled as a pilot experiment in the 1960s, the idea was largely untried, untested, and radical.

To deliver the entire early years' curriculum through a foreign language that students cannot understand seems to run against reason. However, as discussed earlier, the time does seem ripe for the introduction of CLIL in Victoria, with support identified among key stakeholders for schools to at least try such programs. As also highlighted in the data, however, we reiterate that with this opportunity comes the responsibility to ensure strong lines of communication with parents and wider school staff to alleviate any fears or concerns. The second implication concerns the need for the highest quality teaching to ensure CLIL's success. Here, we deliberately emphasise the role of teachers rather than whole school commitment. While not to suggest that a supportive school environment is not significant, it is important to distinguish between whole school support, and whole school commitment.

On commitment, the study confirms that an effective CLIL program can be delivered without necessarily having to make significant demands on existing school structures. This included cases where teachers were able to successfully form collaborative relationships with staff beyond the Languages department, including generalist classroom teachers and content area specialists (even those external to the school). While some changes to regular work practices were required for those who chose to be involved—as would be expected with the introduction of any new approach—these were still able to be negotiated within existing school structures. In contrast to conventional immersion programs that rely heavily on school timetabling, staffing, curriculum organisation, etc., substantial school reorganisation was not a requisite or essential condition for a successful CLIL program.

Even financially, the majority of expenses seemed to be costs generally absorbed by schools (e.g. consumables), rather than requiring expensive CLIL specific items. The largest noticeable expenditure in the study appeared to be directed towards IT equipment (iPads)

which, if necessary, could have also been purchased through other funds or grants (e.g. ICT schemes). Establishing a central pool of CLIL specific resources, through a CLIL teacher network or the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC), made up of commercially produced texts as well as shared teacher-made resources, would also help alleviate costs for classroom materials.

However, in all of the schools studied, it must be acknowledged that there were strong levels of support for attempting the CLIL approach, both at an executive/administration level from principals, as well as from parents. It did not seem relevant or necessary for principals to have had previous experience or background in Languages or bilingual programs, but a high level of support was a clear characteristic across all cases examined in this report.

For introducing CLIL to schools, we would therefore argue for an ambitious approach that encourages as many schools as possible to take up the framework, while also limiting initial opportunities to only those with clear school-based support. In this way, following the outcomes from this trial, supportive school environments will be best positioned to deliver successful programs. This, in turn, will convince those currently skeptical of an integrated approach to reconsider its potential, benefiting CLIL in the medium to long-term.

For a Language teacher to attempt CLIL in an unsupportive school, and then have the program fail, will only reinforce existing negative perceptions/uncertainty about its potential.

CLIL's success therefore ultimately depends on the quality of individual or small groups of teachers, working within supportive school environments. Initially, the size of programs need not matter, but it is critical that teachers have an excellent understanding of the approach to ensure best practice in the programs that are being developed. The medium to long-term growth of CLIL depends absolutely on positive perceptions generated by well-implemented programs, no matter how small. They, in turn, then offer the potential for wider expansion within their own schools, and then throughout the education system more broadly.

Although this trial found that it was possible to successfully develop and deliver CLIL programs across two very different schools, it needs to be acknowledged that the nature of the research process (weekly post-observation interviews to talk through lessons, etc.) also contributed to these teacher participants' understanding of CLIL. As emphasized earlier, CLIL's success is less dependent on whole school commitment, than on individual teacher expertise, knowledge, and skill. All six case studies included teachers who had done previous introductory training in CLIL (either a Professional Certificate or had worked with the research team on related CLIL projects), but levels of confidence and understanding varied among individuals. In cases where teachers were less confident, the vicarious support and guidance provided through the study helped to further develop and refine the skills necessary to realise the full potential of their programs. There are concerns as to whether this would have been possible without mentoring, or if the programs can continue without a stronger independent knowledge base.

Thus, while the study finds that the CLIL framework is viable for application in schools across a range of varied contexts, it is absolutely critical that teachers be adequately trained with its use, and are confident to work independently with it effectively in practice. This will require high quality teacher professional learning beyond a fundamental introduction to CLIL, together with opportunities for ongoing, continuing professional development.

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