

The Implementation of CLIL Method in the Greek Educational System: The Case of its Impact on the Linguistic Competence of 5th and 6th Graders.

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Abstract

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated learning) stands for teaching a non-language school subject in a foreign language where the foreign language and school subject (content) have equal value (Coyle et al., 2010). Since 1990, CLIL has gained priority from all others approaches, and its influence escalated in 2005 with the proposal of the European Parliament that CLIL should be adopted as a method from all the European Union (EC, 2005). CLIL represents the ultimate dream of communicative language teaching (Dalton-Puffer, 2007:3) and is considered to be the ultimate communicative method (Graddol, 2006, p.86). However, Greece is one of the six European countries that have not adopted the CLIL method as an official teaching method yet (Eurydice, 2008). CLIL is currently taught experimentally only at the 3rd Primary Experimental School of Evosmos since 2011. This paper discusses the results of our study, which investigated the impact of CLIL method on the general linguistic proficiency of Greek Primary learners studying English as a foreign language during the academic year 2012-2013. The participants of this study were the students attending the last two grades of Primary School (fifth and sixth grade) of the 3rd Experimental School of Evosmos. At the beginning of the academic year, they took the Flyers Cambridge Young Learners Language test and according to their scores, they were classified to three levels of proficiency in English based on their performance. The conducted study was a quasi-experimental design having as its primary objective to investigate whether there was a linguistic advantage for the experimental group over the control group. In the course of the study, the experimental group participated both in the CLIL program and the courses of a typical EFL lesson while the other group attended only a typical EFL lesson. To compare the linguistic performance of both groups from 5th and 6th grade, we compared the results of language tests designed by the school teachers and administered to both groups of each grade as a pre-test prior to the implementation of the treatment and as a post-test at the end of the academic year after the treatment was implemented. The results of the study revealed that CLIL had shown a positive impact and a potential to the experimental groups of both grades, although the trends are not statistically significant for neither of the two grades. However, the findings indicated that the 5th graders who followed the CLIL program achieved to maintain their level of linguistic proficiency and the 6th graders achieved even to improve it. Consequently, based on the findings as mentioned earlier, CLIL seems to have a strong potential for foreign language teaching in a formal context.

Keywords: Content Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) Implementation in Greece, Second Language Acquisition, Measurement of General Linguistic Competence, Empirical Study, Quasi experiment, 5th and 6th Graders

1. Introduction

According to Parise & Ting (2010, p.113), Europe aiming to thrive in the multilingual and multicultural field proposed that all European citizens speak two foreign languages beyond their mother tongue [L1 +2 (L2)]. Multilingualism is now at the heart of European identity as languages are a fundamental aspect of each European country's cultural identity. One of the most obvious solutions for acquiring language skills in 2 foreign languages is, according to Marsh (2002), the implementation of educational programs where the lessons of the school will be delivered through a foreign language. Consequently, CLIL emerged as a genuinely European solution to a European need (Marsh, 2002 in Parise & Ting, 2010, p.114).

English has a dominant position in the world and constitutes the first choice of foreign language learning for Greek people who consider that speaking the English language will provide with significant educational, professional and socio-economic opportunities (Mattheoudakis & Alexiou, 2009, p.231). The teaching of English in the country's formal public schools starts from the third grade the weekly exposure of Greek primary students and is provided in Table one.

Unfortunately, the existing foreign language education policy in Greece cannot provide Greek students with the ability to conduct great reconciliation both to oral and a written level to act in a multilingual Europe successfully.

According to Eurydice's (2008) research on the implementation of the method in Greece, the reason why CLIL has not been introduced yet as a formal teaching method is the fact that its application would not be easy because Greece has never experienced linguistic diversity. Currently, CLIL is not officially implemented in Greek public schools, and there is no future implementation plan. However, CLIL programs are taught in private schools around the country and are mainly implemented by English language teachers. The non-language subjects taught through CLIL in Primary Education is geography, religious history, artistic, study Environment. In these few cases where CLIL is implemented in Greece (in private schools), teachers report having encountered difficulties such as lack of curriculum autonomy and lack of CLIL hardware. Nevertheless, they report the positive effect on both motivation for pupils learning and their language performance (State-of-Art reports form partners in the CORE project, 2013, p.2-5). Since 2011, however, the implementation of this method is being piloted in the 3rd public Experimental Primary School of Evosmos which is under his supervision of the Department of English Language and Literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

During 2011 CLIL was implemented in the Geography class of the 6th grade. The next academic year it was also implemented both in the subject of Geography and the subject of History. Since 2016, the 3rd Primary Experimental School of Evosmos is the coordinator of the Erasmus + K2 European Program "Promoting CLIL Implementation in Europe", with many partners such as the School of English Language and Literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and Institutions from Italy, Romania, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. The goals of the program are to promote the educational community and support the implementation of the CLIL method. The teaching of each lesson lasts 2 hours per week, and the language of instruction is English.

Nowadays, the school implements CLIL programs from the 3rd to the 6th grade. Specifically, in the 3rd grade CLIL is implemented in the subjects of History and Environmental Studies, in the 4th grade it is implemented in the subject of Environmental Studies, in the 5th grade CLIL is implemented in the subjects of Geography, Religious Education, and Science and finally, in the 6th grade CLIL is implemented in the subjects of Geography and Religious Education. Specifically, the objectives of CLIL implementation to the above-mentioned classes, as mentioned in the official school website (<http://3dim-evosm.web.auth.gr/clil>), focuses on:

- Learning a foreign language in an authentic environment where communication between teacher and students serves the real communication conditions as students are asked to understand cognitive information about another subject and not that of a foreign language.
- Acquiring the foreign language in a way that resembles acquisition of the first language as the student is required to code information and terms for which there is no corresponding knowledge in the native language.
- Gradual exposure of students to scientific texts and scientific terminology.
- Exposure of students to multimodal texts (texts, pictures, videos, songs, bulletin boards) to develop multimodal reading skills.
- Promoting various learning strategies
- Promoting ICT in education

This paper discusses the results of our empirical study, which investigated the impact of CLIL method on the general linguistic proficiency of the 5th and 6th graders during the academic year 2012-2013. The students of both grades who participated in the CLIL program were randomly selected and belonged to at all three levels of linguistic development. The CLIL program was taught in the subject of Geography 2 hours per week in the 5th grade, additionally to the 8-hour program of their traditional EFL teaching. In the 6th grade, the program was implemented for 2 hours in the subject of Geography and for 2 more in the subject of Religious Education additionally to the 8-hour program of their traditional EFL teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. CLIL in Primary Education

According to Coyle et al. (2010), there are three reasons why there has been so much interest in this method. The first reason is that a sense of dissatisfaction was created due to some of the methods of language teaching developed since 1980, which differentiate the meaning from the form of language. The second reason relates to the increasing growth of the conviction that more and more students, even young ones, are possible, to come up with new ways of understanding the world through learning foreign languages. The third and last reason is that the foreign language curriculum for the elementary school is now given emphasis on holistic learning and empowering students as they focus is shifting from general occupation issues to those of their real interests.

To this end, the basic philosophy of the European Union is foreign language learning to start in elementary school and even in kindergarten (EC, 2006). Through this kind of educational services (CLIL), students learn school subjects, and at the same time, they are also working on improving their linguistics skills on the target language. Content and language are combined to provide better preparation for life in Europe, where mobility is increasingly widespread (Eurydice, 2008). CLIL in Primary foreign language teaching is most often carried out in thematic teaching through its link to other curriculum courses (Coyle, Holmes, & King, 2009, p.6).

2.2. The Effect of CLIL on language development

As Marsh concludes, language development in the target language is the point where CLIL can be of interest. CLIL has been used for centuries to provide language-enhanced education, which enabled some young people to graduate from school with the multilingual ability to use two or more languages (2001, p.9). This is because CLIL may be more effective than traditional foreign language teaching to promote proficiency in foreign languages (de Saprobe, 2008, p.70). PE (Plurilingual Education) increases the rate of learning the target language and improving our communication skills seem to be important (Alonso et al., 2008, p.47). One of the main features of CLIL that contributes to the effectiveness of the method in terms of students' language development seems to be the naturalness of the learning framework it provides. CLIL offers students of all ages, a natural environment of language development that builds on other forms of learning (Coyle et al. al., 2010, p.11). This natural use of language can spark an interest about learning, and it seems to be one of the most important foundations for CLIL's importance and success in both language and content (Marsh, 2005, p.5). In particular, positive results have been found with very different types of CLIL, and a small amount of CLIL can greatly help learners improve language development as well willingness to learn the content through the target language. (Marsh, 2001, p.6) Research shows that the biggest gain for CLIL students is that they have a richer vocabulary of technical and academic terms and, scientific terms of the studied subjects. In particular, the linguistic skills that are unaffected or affected less are the syntax, writing, free use of language and pronunciation. Language skills that are favorably affected are (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, p.5) the receptive skills (listening, reading) as opposed to productive ones, the vocabulary, the morphology of the target language (the structure of linguistic units such as prefixes and endings), creativity skills, risk-taking skills and fluency. The CLIL method not only develops linguistic ability but also it opens the horizons of thought by learning through a foreign language. This directly results in a better correlation of the different ideas and helps the student to more advanced levels of language learning and thinking in the target language and not just learning that language per se (Marsh, 2001, p.8).

Although CLIL can bring many advantages, the Lightbown & Spada (2013) identify two potential drawbacks of CLIL being the only method of teaching. First, they point out that meaning often becomes more important than the form, that is, the students are at risk to produce language that is understandable and meaningful in its terms but also contains many linguistic imperfections. Secondly, they point out that verbal interactions between students result in confidence using the language, but with the significant negative impact of most of the language used lacks error correction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of our survey are 78 in total and attended the 5th and 6th grade of the 3rd Primary Experimental School of Evosmos during the academic year of 2012-2013 (Table 2).

We should note that students of the last three grades of this school are classified in English language classes according to their language level which was assessed through a placement test given at the beginning of the school year and designed by the English language teachers of the school. The proficiency levels according to which they are classified are four: the first group consists of excellent students regarding their language competency, the second consists of excellent ones, the third belongs to the mediocre ones, and the fourth level characterizes those exceeding poor performance. The sample of this survey consists of 78 students attending the 5th and 6th grade and according to the results of their placement test they belong to the first, second and third level of linguistic proficiency (Table 3, Table 4).

Specifically, we compared their language development in English after they have been randomly selected to form the experimental to attend the CLIL program. It should be noted that the participants of the experimental group of each grade were chosen randomly by their teachers. Correctly, in the 5th class, the students who took part in the CLIL method and form the experimental group are 17 while the control group (non-CLIL) consists of 22 participants. Concerning the 6th grade, the experimental group consists of 16 students, while the non-CLIL group consists of 23 (Table 2).

At this point we observe that the percentage of the control group (57.7%) that took part in the survey is significantly higher than the experimental (42.3%), something which is justified by the fact that the implementation of the CLIL program in this school was at an experimental stage as the results of the survey was conducted during the third year of application of this method's implementation in the specific school. Note that the comparison. We should also note that all 78 students who form the sample of this survey attended the same school, were classified to the three above-mentioned levels, belonged to the same age group and attended 8-hour traditional EFL instruction. Additionally, the majority of the participants come from low and middle-class families, including some immigrant families (Ziaka, 2014, p.326).

3.2. Instruments and Materials

The experimental implementation of the CLIL method to the above mentioned classes was assessed by an initial and a final evaluation through the Cambridge University's "YLE standardized language tests for young learners which offer one of the few options for a comprehensive assessment of English language proficiency as a foreign language to young learners (Bailey, 2005, p.251). These language tests are in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and corresponding to the evaluation of A1 (Movers) and A2 (Flyers) levels (Osborn, 2014, p.4). The YLE tests extend to three levels according to language proficiency and age of students: Starters, Movers and Flyers. The Starters are designed for 7-year-olds, Movers for older children between 8 and 11 years and the Flyers between 9 and 12 years old (Stephens, 2011: 1). In the present study, both the experimental and control group took the Flyers Cambridge Young Learners Language test at the beginning (September) and at the end (May) of the academic year 2012-2013. The reason the test was initially given at the beginning of the year was to measure the students' consolidated knowledge levels in the already regulated matter and to be broken down into classes according to their performance. This will indeed help effectively identify which students have exhibited more significant linguistic development.

3.3. Procedure

Our research was a quasi-experimental design as it studied the implementation of CLIL method without having total control of the variables and the conditions under which the method was applied. Additionally, there was no equivalence between the experimental and the control group as they have not been randomized (Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) (Cohen et al., 2007, p.283). The gathered data were processed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to measure and evaluate the results coming from the pre-test and the post-test of both groups. The descriptive statistics presented the mean, standard deviation and the standard error of measurement of both groups while the hypothesis test for the mean of independent samples (t-test) was applied for statistically processing the results of pre and post-tests.

3.4. Data Analysis

Concerning the results of the 5th grade, we observe that the experimental group performed better than the control group in both tests though no statistically significant difference was found (Table 5). However, it is noticeable that while the experimental group had higher performance in both tests the linguistic development of the control group was higher than that of the experimental group exceeding 19% from the original test while the experimental group improved its performance only by 11% in the final test (Table 7). At this point, however, we should note that the excellent students cover 54.5% of the control group, and only 17.6% of the experimental group belong to level 1 (Table 3). Concerning the 6th grade, the performance of both groups is almost identical in the initial test. However, following a discussion of the means, we observe that the performance of the control group increased by ten points more than the performance of the experimental group without exhibiting any statistically significant element (Table 6, Table 8).

4. Evaluation and Discussion

Our results for the 5th grade do not appear to coincide with similar research conducted during the academic year 2011-12. The results showed that while the performance of the control group was better in the pre-test, the experimental group shows prominently more significant linguistic development between the two tests (Mattheoudakis et al., 2014, p. 224,228).

In contrast to the 5th grade and concerning the rate of excellence in the 6th grade, we observe that there is little difference between the experimental and the control groups (Table 4). This result may be due to the students' higher level of education as the cognitive and linguistic loads are heavier and are likely to affect students adversely. This is quite prominent in a CLIL class where students of the foreign language they face a more significant cognitive challenge by learning content in another language (McKeon, 1994, p.46).

Research on the implementation of CLIL in Spanish schools, which systematically investigate this method, shows that the results applying the method is not always beneficial to C2 language development, but on the contrary, the performance of some students may deteriorate. Specifically, the creation of non-linguistic content as a learning objective is considered to increase learning motivation when, in fact, the opposite may happen (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009). García et al. (2005,p.471), add that at this point that we should also take into account the fact that the way the language input is presented varies depending on the age of the students and more linguistic-oriented teaching is needed as it grows. Besides, it has been recognized that the requirement of students to operate in an academic environment with a poorly developed target language and without recourse to the first language leads to degradation of both quantity and quality of their studies (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 1984). Students who have the target language as the vehicle of learning the target language may understand the meaning of the content, but they may face difficulty in articulating those words because of possible language makers Required unavailable at the time (Pinker, 1994). Therefore, although young students can develop high levels of proficiency in many languages, the factors affecting success in such results are not always understood either controlled (Anderson et al., 2015, p.145).

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

In conclusion, even in the most excellent CLIL programs, because of inherent difficulties of the method, the degree to which students can surpass themselves in terms of performance is restricted and therefore, different results exist for different students (Harrop, 2012, p.65). Based on recent studies, the majority of students attribute to CLIL programs as it would be expected based on their proficiency level at which students belong to, and some perform less. A smaller percentage of performs better than expected. Perhaps, the achievement of high results in a language test sometimes needs to be sacrificed in order to increase the potential of learning of a foreign language (Harrop, 2012: 65). As Dalton-Puffer (2008: 143) points out, however, even a mediocre grade in a CLIL class expresses a higher level of language proficiency comparing to a typical classroom.

While many studies show that the CLIL approach can be especially effective, it should be noted that neither CLIL nor any educational approach can be a "magic sphere" (Coyle, 2010; Mehisto, 2008). Two key points should be taken into account by each organization wishing to implement a CLIL program. The first point relates to operational parameters such as teacher availability, a collaborative relationship of language and content teachers, linguistics adequacy of students in the target language, duration of the method and ways of assessment and evaluation. The second point concerns the percentage of L2 in the educational process (Coyle et al., 2010, p.14-16). While the widespread use of target language in bilingual programs is a useful and essential educational strategy, we should not rule out the use of L1 which is a powerful resource (Cummins, 2008, p.73-74). Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter consider that the root of CLIL'S problems lies in the fact that it is considered as 'fashionable' (2013,p.14). While the data points to the overall benefits of CLIL for language learning, some academics, such as Bonnet (2012,p. 67) argue that there are no convincing links between learning results and classroom practice. The downside is that studies have received a limited functional-realistic understanding of its responsibilities and do not reach beyond the predefined set of categories that are used for class analysis. In conclusion, there are many views and discussions about the CLIL application, features and its results, but more needs to be done to qualify with accuracy.

The general conclusion that can be drawn is that CLIL is still in an early stage in Europe, and nothing can be taken for granted. More studies are required and especially long term ones to identify all the possibilities and possible weaknesses. In any event, it can be concluded that the results obtained in the present study appear to indicate that CLIL delivers a promising future in the field of foreign-language education worldwide.

6. Tables and Figures

Table 6.1: The weekly exposure of Greek primary students to teaching English as a foreign language in Greek public Primary Schools (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2013:103).

Grade	Age	Hours of exposure per week
3 rd	8	3
4 th	9	3
5 th	10	3
6 th	11	3

Table 6.2: The sample of our survey based on their grade

Grade	Total	N Experimental group	N Control Group
5 th	39	17	22
6 th	39	16	23
Total	78	33	45

Table 6.3: The CLIL and Non-CLIL group of the 5th grade

Grade	Group	Proficiency Level 1	Proficiency Level 2	Proficiency Level 3
5 th	Control	12	0	10
	Experimental	3	14	0
Total		15	14	10

Table 6.4: The CLIL and Non-CLIL group of the 6th grade

Grade	Group	Proficiency Level 1	Proficiency Level 2	Proficiency Level 3
6 th	Control	10	11	2
	Experimental	8	5	3
Total		18	16	5

Table 6.5: The results of the pre-test and post-test of the 5th grade

Grade	Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
5 th	Pre-test	Control	22	25.59	17.26	-1.738	0.090
		Experimental	17	33.18	5.60		
	Post-test	Control	22	33.55	12.77	-1.637	0.110
		Experimental	17	38.91	4.90		

Table 6.6: Percentage of correct answers achieved by the 5th graders

Grade	Test	Group	Percentage of correct answers	Achievement of the experimental group in the Post Test
5 th	Pre-test	Control	51.2%	+19.3%
		Experimental	70.5%	
	Post-test	Control	66.4%	+11.4%
		Experimental	77.8%	

Table 6.7: The results of the pre-test and post-test of the 6th grade

Grade	Test	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
6 th	Pre-test	Control	23	36.04	7.70	0.052	0.959
		Experimental	16	35.91	8.70		
	Post-test	Control	23	38.82	10.92	0.407	0.687
		Experimental	16	37.38	10.85		

Table 6.8: Percentage of correct answers achieved by the 6th graders

Grade	Test	Group	Percentage of correct answers	Achievement of the experimental group in the Post Test
6 th	Pre-test	Control	72.1%	+13.7%
		Experimental	85.8%	
	Post-test	Control	71.8%	+3.1%

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