Development Of Transversal Skills In Content And Language Integrated Learning Classes

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Abstract

The issue of transversal or soft skill development is an important challenge for educational institutions preparing prospective employees for successful integration in the modern global labour market. The implementation of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) provides ample opportunities for the development of soft skills, apart from in-depth learning of the subject and development of language competences. The study presents some insights gained during the in-service training courses for secondary school teachers, while implementing the European Social Fund supported project "Synergy of Content and Foreign Language" at the Institute of Foreign Languages of Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania, with regard to possibilities to better prepare graduates for social integration through efficient implementation of CLIL at school. Among other objectives, the project aimed at professional development of secondary school subject teachers by raising their awareness of CLIL methodology, including transversal skill development. The paper presents investigation into teacher perception of the importance of soft skills and their self-evaluation of practice of soft skill integration into their subject teaching. The issue of transversal skill development is discussed as an integral constituent of project activities, an added value and/or the synergic effect which may be achieved while implementing CLIL at school. The study concludes that CLIL implementation requires the whole school policy, new approach to subject and language teacher in-service training and presents some recommendations for educational policy developers.

Introduction

Successful professional career leading to satisfying and fulfilling life in today's rapidly changing global environment requires from the

participants of global market to have new general competences, i.e. new knowledge, skills, attitudes and ability to learn throughout our whole lives. Consequently, preparation of the young generation for their successful life in the 21st century requires rethinking of teaching methodologies, development of new teacher attitudes and beliefs, and calls for creation of a new whole school ethos. Transmission of subject matter knowledge is no longer useful due to free access to abundance of information sources accessible to everyone momentarily. It is the skills to evaluate this information critically, adapt it, use to one's purposes creatively, communicate to others, ability to manage one's time, work cooperatively in a team, negotiate and argument one's point of view, together with numerous of other so called 'soft' or transferable skills that are of upmost importance to the prospective employers and employees nowadays, and citizen in general, and these skills need to be taught and acquired from the beginning of the first steps of formal education.

The focus of this research will be on opportunities provided for the acquisition of soft skills by teaching content and language in an integrated way at a secondary school. First, a brief analysis of the concept will be discussed, then the theoretical considerations of the advantages of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) will be presented and, finally, insights from the realization of the project "Synergy of Content and Foreign Language" (operational programme: Development of Human Resources, Priority 2 "Lifelong Learning" VP1-2.2-ŠMM-05-K measure: "Designing and implementing language teaching, entrepreneurship and innovative methods of education"), will be presented with regard to possibilities to better prepare graduates for social integration through efficient implementation of CLIL at school. The following research *methods* will be employed: literature analysis, case study, qualitative and quantitative research into teacher opinion and self-evaluation.

Theoretical Framework
Concept of transversal skills

'Soft' or transversal skills are defined by ET 2020 Working Group on Transversal Skills as skills "relevant for individuals as citizens and in employment in today's varied and unpredictable career paths". Such soft skills can be acquired at school and then transferred to areas in different paths of life (COM(2012) 669 final, p. 2). Therefore, their provision should be enhanced and reforms initiated to include introduction of transversal skills "across all curricula from early stages of education up to higher education, using innovative and student centred pedagogical approaches" (ibid, p. 15).

Analysing theoretical sources related to the issue of transversal or soft skill concept, inconsistency in the use of the terms denoting the concept

is evident. Various terms are used with the same meaning, such as: soft, transversal, transferable, interdisciplinary skills, etc. There is also a great variety in identifying the composition of these skills as various sources emphasise different sets of skills. For instance, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (EU) lists such soft skills: ability to think critically, take initiative, problem solving, collaborative work; the National Careers Service, UK, emphasises communicating, being a team player, being flexible, making decisions, showing commitment, having leadership skills, and other skills. For instance, Business Dictionary list such skills as communicating, conflict management human relations, making presentations, negotiating, team building as soft skills.

The Specific Eurobarometer Survey 417 on the most important skills that education provides presents the opinion of almost 28 thousand EU citizens, where even one third (30%) think that most important skills that education provides are "skills which can be used in different jobs, e.g. problem solving, working with others", etc.

Furthermore, increased internationalisation of education in this rapidly shrinking and changing global world forces schools to adapt their education curricula to the requirements of the new reality, including the enhancement of language competences. Rethinking Education initiative launched by the EC in 2012 and its accompanying document "Language competences for employability, mobility and growth" (2012) state that improved language competences will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy of growth and jobs.

In this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) appears as a major innovation geared to achieve increased learner language competence, in-depth subject matter competence, and empower participants of the learning process with a multitude of learning skills (Meehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008).

CLIL as educational innovation

An approach in which a foreign language is used to teach content and in which both content and language competence development are important, has been on the agenda of the European and the world education for more than two decades. Researchers and practitioners consider it to be *a major educational innovation, an innovative methodology, an umbrella term for a variety of educational practices, a new educational model*, *a new form of education,* although recognizing that teaching content in a foreign language is far from being a new phenomenon. Throughout the history, education was often provided not in the learners' first language for a number of reasons. In Lithuania, for instance, Pijorų school (now J. Balčikonis gymnasium) in

Panevėžys, which functioned in 1727-1832, provided schooling in three languages, Polish, Latin and Russian.

However, with the advance of CLIL, opportunities to study meaningful content in another language, participate in authentic communication, comparing the new information with that already acquired, using the target language as a means of communication, have been opened to all. Now language learning integrated with content learning has become accessible to all, "not only those from privileged or otherwise elite backgrounds" (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010, p. 2).

In Lithuania, CLIL has been implemented for almost 15 years, when the first project was launched with the participation of 35 schools aiming at improving foreign language (English, French and German) competence through teaching content and language integrated classes. One of the most successful schools which implemented a number of EMILE projects in secondary education has been Alytus Dzukijos secondary school which, supported by the Embassy of France in Lithuania, launched the first project in 2001-2006 with the French as a foreign language and has been one of the leading Lithuanian secondary education institutions implementing CLIL (EMIL) education since then (Development of CLIL didactical competences, 2013). In Lithuania, CLIL is mostly implemented in 35-40 hour modules; teachers work in tandems: language teachers help subject teachers. The aim of teacher training and in-service programmes and projects is to empower subject teachers with skills and competences to teach CLIL by themselves.

CLIL is taught mainly by applying the *functional bilingualism* approach ("using the mother tongue and mother tongue materials when it is necessary to provide and promote a multi-perspective, contrastive and integrated view of content" (Otten & Wildhage, 2003, p. 550) rather than *monolingualism* (using only the foreign language) context where students learn some subjects through CLIL.

Surveying recent work on CLIL, Dalton-Puffer (2011) describes numerous studies which show better results exhibited by CLIL learners over those learning in regular classes in terms of language learning outcomes:

• CLIL learners' foreign language test scores surpass those of the mainstream learners;

• Their receptive and productive lexicon is larger overall, has a wider stylistic range, is used more appropriately;

• Their writing skills are higher than those of non-CLIL students; they use more elaborate and more complex structures, show a higher degree of accuracy, better fulfil communicative intentions;

• CLIL students are far ahead in oral production area – are more fluent, speak more confidently, are better in spontaneous interactions.

Research findings on content learning outcomes show that:

- CLIL students outperform their peers even tested in L1 as they work more persistently on tasks, can deal with frustration better, thus can acquire more procedural competence in the subject;
- They understand concepts better.

The research findings also show that in CLIL environment "students have more room for active engagement" (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p. 190). CLIL learners tend to be more active and competent internationally; they also use more discourse pragmatic strategies – more diverse functions, more complex meaning negotiations ((Dalton-Puffer & Smit (2010, p. 12).

Most theoretical courses on CLIL emphasise the four-dimensional nature of this approach (Coyle, 1999), which presupposes the benefits of this approach: students acquire competence in the **content,** defined in the curriculum; train their **communication** skills using "language in/through/for learning", develop learners' **cognitive** or thinking skills; at the same they develop **cultural** competences: understanding of otherness and self, deepen feelings of community and global citizenship.

CLIL creates educational environment where natural development of key competencies and soft skills takes place: learners learn to learn, their language and communication competences are developed, their cognitive skills are developed, initiative and creativity are enhanced, conditions for personality growth, development of social-civic competence are created, their cultural awareness and expression are fostered.

Therefore, while performing in-service teacher training activities during the project "Sinergy of content and language" it was purposeful to analyse the subject teacher approach to soft skill development in their classes.

Insights into development of transversal skills in content teaching

The project, supported by the European Social Fund and coordinated by the Institute of Foreign Languages of Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania in 2011-2013 was implemented together with 5 partners; the target group was 121 subject-area teachers and over 600 students. The overarching *aim* of the project was to empower schools with better skills in preparing school-leavers for social integration through qualitative implementation of CLIL at secondary education institutions.

First, the project aimed at improving secondary school subject-area teachers' (n=121) foreign language competences (English, German or French). As the target group consisted of teachers from over 20 diverse secondary education schools from 3 different regions in Lithuania, the project allowed to ensure better social integration of teachers (and consequently, students) living in distant regions. Second, teacher awareness in CLIL methodology and didactics was raised. Then, seminars and

workshops were organised to analyse the use of learner strategies and active learning methods in teaching CLIL, including soft skill development, improving teacher and learner social skills. Next, learning/teaching in virtual environment was employed as a tool for cooperation and skill gaining, promoting cultural awareness and multilingualism. The secondary aim of the project was introducing pupils to new ideas and concepts in traditional curriculum subjects, using the foreign language as the medium of communication, which helped to enhance the pupils' learning experience by exploiting the synergies between the two subjects. 18 subjects were taught practically implementing CLIL by integrating content and English language classes in English, 12 – French language and 6 – German language classes. The project presented its recommendations for educational policy developers.

General Programmes of Basic Education in the Lithuanian Republic, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2008, foresee the development of general competences (cognitive, communicative, learning to learn, social, initiative and creativity, personal) together with essential subject-area competences as the expected outcomes of Lithuanian secondary education. Thus, while analysing the opportunities provided by CLIL for the development of general competences and soft skills, one of group research tasks for teachers during the implementation of the project was to refer to various theoretical CLIL sources and list 10 most important soft skills under each of 6 general competences, taking into account the relative nature of such attribution. Then teachers had to assess the soft skills in terms of two criteria: 1) the importance of the soft skill for student education and 2) how the soft skill is addressed by teachers themselves in teaching their subject. The results of the survey on the importance of soft skill development and practice of such skill development are presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table1. Survey of importance and addressing development of Cognitive and Communicative competences and soft skills in subject-area (n=89)

I.	Cognitive competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Attention skills - ability to remain focused on task	100	100
2	Memory skills - ability to store and recall information	76	46
3	Critical thinking	84	78
4	Problem solving - ability to define a problem, generate alternatives	94	90
5	Logic and reasoning skills (ability to form concepts, match, categorise, extrapolate, elaborate)	94	76
6	Decision making - consider possible solutions, choose best options	94	78
7	Research and analysis skills and practices	88	67
8	Ability to manage information - gather, sort, store and use	100	94
9	Auditory and visual processing	100	100
10	Media and internet skills	100	93
II.	Communication competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Ability to exchange ideas & information clearly with different audiences in diverse situations	67	52
2	Sensitivity - ability to show concern and respect to others	51	47
3	Oral and written communication skills	100	86
4	Intercultural awareness	88	45
5	Ability to interact with different individuals and audience members	98	47
6	Being a team player	100	69
7	Being flexible in taking action	32	26
8	Capacity of public speaking and presenting	98	59
9	Capacity of active listening	98	60
10	Teamwork, collaboration, cooperation	99	91

Only a few soft skills were evaluated by all teachers – research respondents - as equally important and addressed while teaching their subjects, such as „development of attention skills", „auditory and visual processing", „ability to carry out a task and complete it". A number of other skills were assessed as important, although not addressed during the teaching and learning process. The highest discrepancy is seen in evaluating memory skills (76% and 46% respectively) and a number of soft skills in the communicative competence domain: „ability to interact with different individuals and audience members" (the difference is 51%), „intercultural awareness" (43%), „capacity of public speaking and presenting, capacity of active listening" (see Table 1). Teachers admit that these skills are important, however, they do not devote enough time and attention to the development of these learner skills during their classes.

Table 2. Survey of importance and addressing development of Learning to learn and Social competences and soft skills in subject-area (n=89)

III.	Learning to learn competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Accepting responsibility for one's learning	100	67
2	Ability to set goals, reach them and (self)evaluate	94	62
3	Verbal mediation and affirmation (cognitive restructuring - paraphrase, self-talk)	88	79
4	Reflecting about one's learning	56	49
5	Attention control	99	80
6	Ability to manage time or being able to set priorities and decide	94	72
7	Ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully	94	72
8	Ability to seek advice, information and support when appropriate	96	96
9	Commitment to quality, striving to achieve best results	96	72
10	Awareness of one's learning and use of learner strategies	74	48
IV.	Social competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Ability to interact with others, willingness to cooperate, negotiate and compromise appropriately	96	79
2	Sefl-awareness, awareness of needs of others	82	46
3	Being able to enter ongoing discussions, making relevant contributions	88	60
4	Capacity to empathize	94	37
5	Emotional intelligence	79	51
6	Being accepted by peers	98	81
7	Social responsibility - recognising that your behaviour, actions fit the community	83	44
8	Values diversity, pursues inclusion of those with different backgrounds	86	69
9	Ability to give credit and recognition to those who have contributed	49	49
10	Leadership skills - ability to organise & motivate others	90	82

Comparing teacher attention given to different competences it is evident that the majority of subject teachers give priority to the development of cognitive competence (Table 1), learning to learn (Table 2) and personal competences (Table 3) which were considered as important by over 95% of teachers; whereas communicative and social competences were evaluated as important by slightly over 80% of teachers. Analysing specific soft skills in the domain of these competences, less than half of the teachers admitted not addressing even 4 of skills from each of these competences.

Personal competence development was self-evaluated by teachers as not only one of the most important areas but also as the one which is most addressed during their teaching (Table 3).

Table 3. Survey of importance and addressing development of Initiative and creativity and Personal competences and soft skills in subject-area (n=89)

V.	Initiative and creativity competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Entrepreneurship skills	56	33
2	Global awareness, multicultural literacy	94	76
3	Perseverance, adaptability, initiative	94	58
4	Ability to raise new ideas, realise creatively, think outside the box	87	62
5	Confidence in one's creative powers	85	60
6	Ability to adapt information in innovative way	92	74
7	Ability to try new methods for completing tasks	93	93
8	Ability to work with minimum supervision, being self-directed	96	80
9	Digging beneath the obvious to get at the facts	97	93
10	Creativity, artistry, personal expression	85	72
VI.	Personal competence	Important %	Addressed %
1	Ability to manage personal reactions & attitude towards challenges	96	71
2	Self-assurance, self-confidence	100	96
3	Ability to face and cope with difficulties	100	96
4	Independent learning, self-motivation	96	80
5	Ability to accept and incorporate feedback	94	94
6	Ability to evaluate one's own behaviour and that of others	96	84
7	Being dependable, trustworthy and committed to mutual agreement	96	93
8	Ability to carry a project or task through to completion	100	100
9	Being at ease outside their "comfort zone" - risk taker	87	78
10	Being good at judgement making, taking time to collect facts before decision making	89	78

Summarising it can be stated that the development of soft skills listed under cognitive and personal skills received the highest evaluations in terms of their importance (on average 93% and 95.4% respectively). 10 soft skills listed under different competences were evaluated as important by all teachers. However, although all teachers agreed that all six competences are important and students should acquire various soft skills, the difference between the assessed skill in terms of its importance and how it is addressed and developed in teaching the subject is evident. Only in evaluation of 14 soft skills (out of 60) the difference between "importance" and "addressing" was equal or less than 5%. Evaluation of "capacity to emphasise" and "ability to interact with different individuals and audience members" exhibited the greatest discrepancy between the importance and addressing factors at the difference of 57% and 51% respectfully, i.e. teachers understand their importance but devote little attention to developing this skill during their subject lessons. Other soft skills which received lack of attention (although being evaluated as important) were these: "intercultural awareness" (43%), "social responsibility" (39%), "capacity of public

speaking" (39%), "active listening" (38%), self-awareness, awareness of others" (36%).

A number of teachers stated that in teaching their subject they did not take time to develop, for instance, such soft skills as "sensitivity – ability to show concern to others" (43%), teaching "being flexible in taking action" (74%) (by the way, this soft skill was evaluated as least important by 68% of the teachers), "capacity to emphasise" (63%), "entrepreneurship skills" (67%), "emotional intelligence" (49%), etc. as the development of such skills goes beyond the goals of teaching their subject and they do not have enough time to develop them at the expense of teaching content. It was interesting to notice that social and communicative competences were least addressed by subject teachers as only 58.2% and 59.8% of teachers respectfully admitted developing these competences in teaching their subjects.

On the basis of the training sessions in the foundations of CLIL methodology and its didactical principles, use of active methods, awareness training in learning strategy integration, after the survey and discussion of its results, the teachers agreed that integration of content and language in their classes provides ample opportunities for soft skill development, and that they should be more considerate in addressing soft skills in their subject-area teaching and learning processes.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that teachers need to rethink the aims and learning outcomes that can be achieved by teaching their subject as some of them are too much oriented to the importance of content provision and acquisition, without considering the opportunities for general competence and soft skill development; furthermore, teachers have to consider the value of interdisciplinary knowledge and transferability of soft skills in teaching their subjects.

The issue of soft skill development was discussed as an integral constituent in all project activities; it was seen as an added value and/or the synergic effect which may be achieved while implementing CLIL at school. Efficient CLIL implementation requires the whole school policy and changes in subject and language teacher education.

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