

# CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING AND ITS ADVANCEMENT IN SLOVAKIA

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## **Abstract**

This article provides approximation to the literature which has been produced in Slovakia on the European approach to bilingual education CLIL (content and language integrated learning). It opens with defining this more and more acknowledged model and by tracing the steps leading towards the progress of CLIL in Europe and Slovakia. Presented is also a model of classification of the research projects in Slovakia introduced by Pokrivčáková with its brief analysis. This has been done by examining papers that resulted from the State Pedagogical Institute Projects under the Ministry of Education, cultural-educational projects, and individual academic research. Upon examination of these papers, it becomes clear that there is still a well-documented paucity of research in the area of students' attitudes in connection to CLIL implementation.

**Key Words:** content and language integrated learning, research, learning, attitudes

## **Abstrakt**

Tento článok sprostredkúva syntézu literatúry, ktorá bola vyprodukovaná na Slovensku v rámci témy európskeho prístupu k bilingválnemu vyučovaniu CLIL (obsahovo a jazykovo integrované vyučovanie). Následne opisujeme teoretické zhrnutie a základné informácie o čim ďalej, tým viac uznávanej metodológii CLILu a ideme po stopách, ktoré viedli k jej rozvoju ako v Európe, tak aj na Slovensku. V ďalšej kapitole autor príspevku prináša model klasifikácie výskumov na Slovensku podľa Pokrivčákovovej, doplnený o ich analýzu. Tá bolo dosiahnutá štúdiom literatúry vychádzajúcej z projektov vedených Štátnym pedagogickým ústavom pod záštitou Ministerstva školstva, kultúrno-vzdelávacích projektov a individuálnych akademických výskumov. Po vyhodnotení týchto dokumentov sa nám ukázalo, že oblasť zaoberajúca sa skúmaním postojov žiakov k metodológii CLIL je otvorená ďalšiemu výskumu.

**Kľúčové slová:** obsahovo integrované učovanie, výskum, učenie, postoje

## **Introduction**

As the accelerating globalisation is propelling the English language as a device for intercultural communication, Europe searches for more efficient models of language teaching. One such method, which supports mixing the mother language and the foreign language within the structure of lessons, is referred to as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Slovakia is among the countries that are making significant contributions in the research and application of CLIL.

As CLIL continues to be positioned as a modern educational practice, it changes in various aspects the role of a language teacher in current school systems. CLIL highlights the necessity of language teachers working more closely with content curriculum in their language classes, with the final goal of making language teaching and learning more efficient and integrated.

This paper focuses on an overview of CLIL research conducted in Slovakia. CLIL integration method is slowly becoming more popular and is claiming its place in our school system.

## **1 Definition of CLIL**

The term CLIL was formed and defined initially by David Marsh in 1994, as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle et al., 2010, Mehisto et al., 2008, Marsh et al., 2001). As Coyle et al. further explain, CLIL method accommodate students with more holistic educational experience than may otherwise be commonly achievable (2010). It is necessary to note that CLIL as a content-driven foreign language methodology differs from the regular bilingual education in that it is not conducted purely in the vehicular language, but instead merges two or more languages (usually mother language with a foreign language). We can say that in CLIL, the language of instruction is set at varied ratios to the mother language. The proportion depends on the type of CLIL implemented. Pokrivčáková (2010) describes two main types of CLIL instruction approaches according to the amount of foreign language used: additive (low exposition (5 – 15%) and medium exposition (15 – 50%)) and immersive (high exposition (50-100%)). Similar classification into: extensive (50–100%) and partial (5–49%) instruction through the vehicular language is introduced by Coyle et al. (2010).

CLIL systematically combines academic objectives with language objectives, and is aligned with cognitive and metacognitive growth of the students. (Marsh et al., 2000, Coyle et al., 2010) However, the relationship between CLIL and metalinguistic awareness development falls outside the scope of this paper.

Mehisto et al. (2008) bring into attention another misconception, which is that bilingual education is only for the brightest students. From the result of the experiments run in multilingual locations (e.g Luxembourg, Singapore) can be seen that average C-grade students do well in CLIL programs as they not only keep the C-grades, but they also learn to speak another language and gain many socio-cultural skills (Mehisto et al., 2008). Similarly in our context the mistaken belief of bilingual education idealisation occurs. Pokrivčáková (2013) explains that “teaching bilingually” at bilingual Slovak schools means teaching a minimum of three content subjects purely in a foreign language either by native or non-native teachers which leads towards the belief that bilingual education is considered too challenging and demanding for the majority of learners and consequently it is recommended only to highly motivated students with above-average intellectual skills and language aptitude. To bring the benefits of bilingual instruction to as many learners as possible, a method of CLIL was introduced to Slovak schools shortly after 2000 (Pokrivčáková, 2013).

Currently, English language is the most frequently applied vehicular language in CLIL methodology in Slovakia followed by German, Spanish and French, taught alternatively with Russian and Italian. To this date, there is only one known school applying CLIL programme in Romany language (ŠPÚ, 2017). This is despite the fact that the European Union's prime goals for adopting CLIL methodology include supporting the multilingualism of Europe and promoting other official State languages and/or regional minority languages (Eurydice, 2006). Coyle et al. (2010, p.9) believe that CLIL as a promoter of LOTE (Languages Other Than English) has yet to reach its potential in the global arena and may not do so until the 'saturation' of English as the CLIL medium. Even though in Slovakia, a state language, i.e. Slovak, is the main language of instruction at the majority schools, we do have schools with teaching languages of minorities or ethnic groups. In these schools, in addition to the state language, education takes place also in Hungarian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Ruthenian, and German (EACEA, 2018). Content and language integrated learning through languages other than English could be seen as an effective solution in such schools where we are likely to witness higher adoption in the long run.

## **2 EU support for CLIL and its progress into legislation**

Education in foreign languages is as old as education itself and throughout the human history we can find multiple examples of educational models which might have carried very similar characteristics with our modern day CLIL methodology.

For the purpose of this paper, only the main recent events leading towards the progress of CLIL in Europe will be mentioned. Significant is emerging of 'cognitive revolution' in the 1950s, where a focus on cognition and communication to improve overall efficiency in education has arisen and made its way into modern education concepts (Hanesová, 2015). An important milestone leading towards the advancement of CLIL in Europe was reached on 1 January 1990 through the Lingua programme run by the European Commission, which declared the significance of 'promoting innovation in methods of foreign language training' and strengthening European co-operation to keep the multilingualism of Europe and to equip students with the set of basic skills which are appropriate to the new economic and social environment (European Commission, 1990). Since then, the European Union has realised the importance of advancements in the field of education and it has started to search for a new methodology. Inspiration arrived from Canada's and the United States' integration models. One of the first modern era language- and content-integrated programmes was formed around 1965 by a group of English-speaking families living in Quebec, Canada, who wished for a programme for their children that would give them an equal opportunity of becoming French-speaking Canadians as well as English-speaking Canadians (Baker as cited in Hanesová, 2015). Further, the *Council Resolution of 31st March 1995* on improving and diversifying language learning and teaching within the education systems of the European Union was the first formal expression of intention agreed on by a legislative body of the European Union to promote innovative methods in schools and universities on language classes within essential timetable constraints (Council of the European Union, 1995). The Council indicated the necessity not only to promote improvement in knowledge of the languages of the European Union and ensuring that all Member States' languages and cultures are disseminated as

widely as possible but also to take steps to encourage diversification in the languages taught in the Member States (Council of the European Union, 1995).

This document was followed by *White Paper of European Commission: Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society* from 1995, which sets out the action to be taken in the Member States in order to develop proficiency in three European languages (European Commission, 1995). Subsequently, in the years 2000-2006, the European Union has started to train volunteered teachers of non language subjects in a foreign language through the Socrates II, Comenius and Erasmus Programmes (Hanesová, 2015). In 2001, *the European Year of Languages*, the attention was again brought to CLIL type provision and the CLIL approach was recommended for the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity in Europe. In 2002, Marsh published a report, *EC publication CLIL/EMILE: The European Dimension: Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*, with a set of external statements and recommendations provided by key European experts in various fields of expertise on the relevance and potential of CLIL. The European Council, together with the Educational Council, urged Action Plan 2004-2006, where CLIL provision is cited as having ‘a major contribution to make to the Union’s language learning goals’ (Eurydice, 2006). In the same year, the European Commission launched a sequence of publications with the aim of assessing, describing and comparing new innovative language learning methods in co-operation with David Marsh and the Education Information Network in Europe, the Eurydice Network (Eurydice, 2006).

CLIL has its role in the current philosophy of language teaching in Slovakia since 2007, when Slovak Ministry of Education published *The Conception of teaching foreign language in primary and secondary schools* (Hanesová, 2015). The Conception (2007) defines the goals and steps in changing the language education model in Slovakia. It defines the years from 2008 to 2019 as the ‘transit period’ within which a new, reformed model, based on The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR/SEER) and The European Union requirements, will be applied. Despite the fact that the CLIL method has been referred to as one of the most widespread and effective methods of teaching foreign languages as well as being recommended by the currently valid Conception of teaching foreign languages in Slovakia, as of now, no formal framework or methodological instructions have been formulated within the national educational legislative (Pokrivčáková, 2015). This is expected to change in the forthcoming years after the transit period (2008-2019) is over.

### **3 CLIL research in Slovakia**

The following overview uses a model of classification of the research projects introduced by an expert in this field Pokrivčáková. Research in Slovakia has been conducted via the following three means: the State Pedagogical Institute Projects under the Ministry of Education; cultural-educational projects; and individual academic research (Pokrivčáková, 2013).

Pokrivčáková (2015, 2013) highlights mainly the following threefold classification of the CLIL research in Slovakia:

- learner-oriented CLIL research;

- teacher-oriented CLIL research; and
- language-based CLIL research.

Pokrivčáková (2015) further divides **the learner-oriented CLIL research** into:

a) analysis of the influence of CLIL on learning outcomes of learners in various educational environments (primary, secondary, tertiary education), and

b) measuring the influence of CLIL on learners' psycholinguistic characteristics, e.g. motivation, attitude to a foreign language, etc.

To the field of the influence on learning outcomes belongs works of: Menzlová (2012, *Experimental Verification of CLIL's Pedagogical Effectiveness in Foreign Language Education at Primary Level*), Kubeš (2013, *The application of the CLIL approach in the 4th grade math class*) and Luprichová (2013, *Modernization of Teaching English as a Foreign Language by Means of CLIL Methodology*). The State Pedagogical Institute project, funded by the Slovak Ministry of Education, ran *Effectiveness of CLIL in Teaching Foreign Languages in primary Education*, a 5-year long national pedagogical experiment stretching over the years 2008-2013. The project measured and compared learning results of 361 primary learners from 22 schools across Slovakia. Its main objective was to measure effectiveness and prove applicability of the new CLIL methodology into our school system. Learners' foreign language proficiency was tested at the end of each school year (June 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) in the following areas: vocabulary (both active and passive), listening, reading and writing skills. The comparison of knowledge levels in content subjects (Science and Maths) was not incorporated into the interpretation of final results. The pilot and partial results were published by Pokrivčáková, Menzlová, Farkašová (2010) and the final results by Menzlová (2013). Based on the significantly improved results in all observed areas was issued set of recommendations for schools planning to apply CLIL in their primary classes (MŠVVŠ SR, online). The positive impact of this experimental national project persuaded the assessing committee to make the decision to bring this project also to the lower secondary schools and, under the name *CLIL in Lower Secondary Education*, introduced the continuation of the former mentioned project (ŠPU, 2013). This project has been conducted on 14 basic schools within Slovakia and at the present moment is in its final stages. As Menzlová (2014) states, the prime effort during the continuation of the project will be given to the education of the teachers within CLIL methodology, as the partial results of the current project shows there is a deficiency in mainly the content and language teachers competences with CLIL and insufficient materials portfolio for CLIL education. As this project is in its final phase, we are currently waiting for the results.

The teacher-oriented CLIL research in Slovakia has been conducted by Hurajová (2013), Menzlová (2012), Luprichová (2011), Pokrivčáková (2013a, 2013b), and Sepešiová (2013). Pokrivčáková (2015). Despite the high value of the conducted research, Pokrivčáková had noticed that the fundamental cultural dimension of CLIL from the 4C Framework as defined by Coyle (2010, p.41), both in pedagogical practice and research projects, was usually overlooked by the teachers. The importance of this EFL teacher's role highlights also Cimermanová (2014, p. 61) by

stating the importance to teach students to see themselves from the external perspective so they understand how to interact with people from different cultures. Culture, sometimes referred to as the ‘the forgotten C’, should be interlaced throughout any topic, fostering international understanding and creating global citizenship. (Do Coyle, 2010)

The language-oriented CLIL research deals with roles of mother and target languages as languages of instruction in CLIL classes, as well as the various ways how these languages are used (e.g. in the form of code-switching (the alternating use of two or more languages)) and how they support or interfere with each other. Pokrivčáková (2015) compares the abundant scene of international CLIL research to the Slovak circumstances and discloses that the amount of research in this largely enticing and rewarding department of the CLIL domain falls behind the international scene. The significance of devoting more attention to this area shows the results of of (Gondová, 2012b; Králiková, 2013). These are showing disappointing results to us in the field of classroom interaction. The non-CLIL English classes’ interaction, when compared to with the level of classroom interaction in the observed CLIL lessons, was not significantly different in any of the following: the amount of learners’ talking time, the frequency and type of communication structures, initiating communication, and applying teaching techniques which support the interaction between learners. This non-learner-oriented approach is not in alignment with CLIL goals. In the observed CLIL classes, the classroom communication was usually initiated and led by teachers, which means that the learners remained as passive learners. The possible explanation of this present situation within the CLIL classes in Slovakia could be that the teachers tend towards controlled or semi-controlled activities and tasks and are not willing to ‘lose’ control of what their students do in the class, as Gondová (2012b) assumes. In this way, they keep the students dependent on the teacher and hinder the development of higher-order cognitive thinking processes. The teacher-oriented teaching model might be the result of the historical background and learning tradition in Slovakia, which was standardised, or it might simply be the lack of knowledge of learner-oriented methods’ (Gondová, 2012b). This might be due to the gap in the teaching system. The teachers are educated in the theory and learn the concepts but they are not taught how to apply theory into teaching practice. The teachers know that it is of the highest importance to develop cognition of the students but they are not trained in how to do so.

Králiková’s analysis of classroom code-switching by both the teacher or learners, in Slovak CLIL classes similarly shows the teacher -centred approach (2013).

### **3.1 Research of learners’ attitudes in CLIL**

An important division that is worth mentioning is research of learner’s attitudes in CLIL integration. In some countries like the Netherlands, Germany or Spain, CLIL has been advancing over a period of years, but to our knowledge analysis of students’ attitudes has been generally neglected (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2009). As per Pokrivčáková (2013), in Slovakia the field of attitudes within CLIL methodology was researched in three studies: Luprichová (2013) concentrated on primary learners, Gondová (2012) on secondary students, and higher education was studied by Kováčiková (2013). Marsh (2000) highlights the importance of paying more attention to the attitudes of the students by stating that CLIL programmes can support *a feel good*

*attitude* among students and lead towards increased motivation in learning. Out of the CLIL context, the measurement of students' attitudes and a decline in positive attitudes towards the school subjects has been measured by multiple boards of researchers (Davies and Brember 2001; Cenoz 2001, etc.). Cenoz (2001) analysed the attitudes towards English of three different age groups of students ranging from 9-17 years (at primary, secondary and high school). The results showed that the youngest group held significantly more positive attitudes towards the foreign language, whereas the oldest learners presented the least positive ones. Cenoz considered both psychological and educational factors to explain these results. The results showed a decline in attitudes towards the foreign language with growing age and this leads us to wonder whether the use of a CLIL type approach may help to avoid or at least diminish this tendency of declination in students' attitudes. The results of the research of learners' attitudes in connection to CLIL in Slovakia prove this to be the case as we can see in the research of Luprichová (2013), Gondová (2013) and Kováčiková (2013). The results show that the attitudes of the students that went through the CLIL experience are more positive towards the language learning and the content subject. There is the inclination of the older students from lower and higher secondary schools to favour the CLIL approach more, as they find it more meaningful and useful for their future progress.

The situation at primary school is not unequivocal. Luprichová (2013) proved that implementation of CLIL in primary education does not negatively influence learners' attitudes towards either English or Science, as both subjects remained among their favourite subjects during the entire experiment. She also states that when asked more specifically which type of lessons the pupils liked more – lessons taught only in Slovak or lessons in both Slovak and English – the learners were divided into nearly equal groups: 52.4% of them prefer monolingual lessons in Slovak, while 47.6% of them would prefer bilingual classes with two languages of instruction (Pokrivčáková, 2013). It is believed that the longer the students are exposed to a certain methodology, the more they get used to it and consequently the whole studying process becomes for them easier which might also change their attitudes. In the above mentioned research, students were also asked about the difficulty of the CLIL method, where two thirds of the respondents expressed that learning Science through two languages is demanding (9.5% of learners elect for “very difficult”, 57.1 marked “it may be difficult”) Despite the previously mentioned data, Luprichová, supported by the data from other topic-related questionnaire items, found that more than 70% of primary learners in the experimental group perceived learning science through the English language positively (either strongly or moderately positively) and only one learner was moderately negative in his/her opinion (Pokrivčáková, 2013). Gondová's (2013) results show more clear results as 60% of older learners (15-18 years) answered they liked learning other subjects in a foreign language. Younger learners (10-15 years old) were more restrained: only 40% of them expressed their decidedly positive attitude. When asked if they feel more motivated by learning in a foreign language, more than 60% of lower secondary respondents answered “no” or “I do not know”: on the other hand, more than 60% of higher secondary respondents answered “yes”.

The general overview of the data illustrated that students, teachers, and educators, as well as parents, have positive attitudes towards CLIL. Most of the students, especially at the primary level, were quite indecisive and hesitant in their responses when expressing their attitudes. Prime

example is when 61.9% of respondents opted for “Maybe I want to learn Science in English” and 28.6% of them were undecided (Luprichová, 2013). With the more exposure to CLIL, it can be assumed that the reality and perception changes together with the attitudes of the pupils. Even though the up-to-date results incline more towards a positive perception, it would be interesting to run the same, or maybe more detailed, experiments on the field of the attitudes and see how the course of the time and maturing of the students changes them. The pool of the pupils would ideally remain the same previously tested students who were exposed to CLIL.

## Conclusion

The present day economic and sociocultural situation has changed its demand towards education. It is not only new technologies that are shaping requirements on education but also the new way our students think. Here, the past is an increasingly unreliable guide to the future. The presented review of different studies revealed that the use of CLIL methodology proves to have a positive impact not only on learning outcomes of learners (at primary, secondary and tertiary education), on their motivation and attitude to a foreign languages but also on higher cognitive processes. Content and language integrated learning is propelling its way into the European legislative in a confident way. Although CLIL can be implemented in different foreign languages, the fact remains that English is the language overwhelmingly used as a means of instruction in most European countries (Eurydice, 2006). The European Commission decision to support CLIL methodology and the positive outcomes of the research projects are indicating the possible direction towards broader implementation of CLIL in Slovakia and approximating to Western Europe standards within language learning. As teaching in CLIL is evolving through the experience of the teachers, the experience of the students changes as well and there might be a tendency that their attitudes towards the methodology might, in the course of time, be altered. In the Slovak context we have received not always overwhelmingly positive results in the field of attitudes from the students towards the CLIL methodology, e.g. Kubeš (2012). Therefore, it is advisable to open the subject of the attitudes to further research, possibly on the same sample of the students that have been already put through CLIL experience and have been tested on their attitudes and motivation levels. Research studies show that the more positive the students' attitudes are, the higher their L2 achievement is and thus we should pay more attention to this topic.

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