

## **CLIL as the most efficient approach to bilingual teaching. Implementation of CLIL in VET in Spain**

CLIL jako najbardziej efektywne podejście do nauczania dwujęzycznego. Wdrożenie CLIL w kształceniu i szkoleniu zawodowym w Hiszpanii

**Key words:** education, CLIL, bilingual teaching, Spanish education, AICLE, Erasmus+, CLIL-VET, vocational education and training, Europe.

**Abstract.** Bilingual teaching has been a staple in many European countries for a long time in secondary education, but adapting it to Vocational Education and Training courses is a relatively new trend. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is probably the most efficient approach to bilingual teaching, and it is widely used across Europe. This article covers the present-day situation in Spain in bilingual teaching with and without CLIL, which is highly dependent on the regional educational legislation. Since Vocational Education and Training presents a significant degree of diversity among the students, particularly regarding their proficiency level in foreign languages, it can be quite challenging to adapt the teaching for these heterogeneous groups. Finally, we will also offer some suggestions to improve upon the current paradigm, which would probably involve some legislation changes, since the Spanish educational system presents significant singularities from one autonomous region to the other.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, CLIL, nauczanie dwujęzyczne, edukacja hiszpańska, AICLE, Erasmus +, CLIL-VET, kształcenie i szkolenie zawodowe, Europa.

**Streszczenie.** Nauczanie dwujęzyczne od dawna jest podstawą w wielu krajach europejskich w szkolnictwie średnim, ale dostosowanie go do kursów kształcenia i szkolenia zawodowego jest stosunkowo nowym trendem. Zintegrowane uczenie się treści i języka (CLIL) jest prawdopodobnie najbardziej efektywnym podejściem do nauczania dwujęzycznego i jest szeroko stosowane w całej Europie. Ten artykuł dotyczy współczesnej sytuacji nauczania dwujęzycznego w Hiszpanii, która jest wysoce zależna od regionalnego ustawodawstwa edukacyjnego. Ponieważ kształcenie i szkolenie zawodowe cechują się znacznym zróżnicowaniem wśród uczniów, szczególnie pod względem poziomu ich znajomości języków obcych, dostosowanie nauczania w tych heterogenicznych grupach może być dość trudne. Na koniec proponujemy również kilka sugestii dotyczących ulepszenia obecnego paradygmatu, co prawdopodobnie wiązałoby się

z pewnymi zmianami legislacyjnymi, ponieważ hiszpański system edukacji charakteryzuje się znacznymi różnicami w poszczególnych regionach autonomicznych.

**Introduction.** Teaching subjects using a foreign language is hardly a new concept, as bilingual teaching has been present across Europe for many years. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has subsequently been steadily getting more and more attention as an interesting tool, particularly in Primary and Secondary Education. It was only natural that Vocational Education and Training Courses would eventually follow suit, and whereas some countries there are very comprehensive CLIL programmes for Vocational Education and Training learners, others, like Spain, are a bit more flexible.

The reasons for adopting CLIL are pretty clear: improving foreign language skills, increasing motivation in the learners or new perspectives for both teachers and learners, to name a few. As a consequence, CLIL has become a focus of attention in European policies as well. The European Commission's White Paper on "Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society" mentions proficiency in three languages as one of the objectives of Education in Europe. Also, the European Commission's report on foreign language teaching and learning states that using language "for a purpose" (such as in CLIL) is an excellent way of improving the proficiency in a foreign language.

More recently, the European Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages urges member states to "apply comprehensive approaches to improve teaching and learning of languages at national, regional, local or school level as appropriate, and where relevant" and it also addresses Vocational Education and Training as one of the areas that should follow this approach to foster mobility in both learners and teachers across the European Union.

Clearly, learning a foreign language should be a priority for European students for a variety of reasons, and CLIL can be a great help to achieve that goal, strengthening the learners' linguistic skill while they are working in non-linguistic areas during their training.

**Erasmus+ project.** Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion. It also aims to promote the sustainable development of its partners in the field of higher education, and contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. One of Erasmus+ main goals is "promoting adult learning, especially for new skills and skills required by the labour market", and this is where Vocational and Educational Training plays a relevant role.

Since 2017, we have been working in an Erasmus+ project named "Implementing the CLIL model in vocational schools". It is an international educational project launched under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2: Strategic Partnership, Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices for vocational training and education.

One of its main aims is to improve the quality of professional education and training through the introduction of more CLIL elements into vocational schools.

Throughout the project, a framework on how to use CLIL in vocational schools was developed. We also wrote several reports on the CLIL status on the partner countries (Poland, Austria, Romania and Spain) and conducted several surveys among teachers and learners in order to learn more about their experiences with CLIL and get some feedback about bilingual teaching in general and CLIL as a learning tool. This article stems from the actions designed in the project as a final product that has transpired from the findings we obtained while doing our research for previous stages in the project.

**Bilingual teaching in Spain.** CLIL teaching in Spain has historically been implemented with a varying degree of success by the regional administrations since the 1990s, when the British Council started cooperating with the Spanish Ministry of Education. However, it took a long time until bilingual teaching in Spanish schools was officially regulated by the Central Administration. In 2006 bilingual teaching was mentioned in Spanish legislation as a tool to improve students' proficiency in a foreign language, typically English. Since then, bilingual teaching and by extension CLIL has been steadily gaining presence in Primary and Secondary Education, and also in some Vocational Education and Training courses.

Spain is a very diverse country, and its regions have a great deal of autonomy to develop their own legislation regarding education. It is worth noting that several regions in Spain speak at least one more local language besides Spanish such as Galician, Catalan or Basque, so the CLIL approach would have to accommodate for that. Hence there are many trilingual schools in some regions of Spain, whereas monolingual regions will only use Spanish and a foreign language (usually English, but in some schools French or even German) as the vehicular language.

As a consequence of this diversity, CLIL implementation varies significantly from one Spanish region to the next. Some regions have no obligation of using bilingual teaching whatsoever and therefore limit CLIL teaching to specific bilingual schools, while others are legally bound to include bilingual teaching to some extent in their students' curricula. While this loose approach to bilingual teaching might seem a bit chaotic at first, it actually fosters flexibility and autonomy among the teachers involved in any of the bilingual programs, which can ultimately be beneficial for the students.

Since one of the main advantages of CLIL is its versatility, its principles can be adapted to every particular situation. However, the lack of a tighter framework for the teachers can be challenging for those professionals that lack experience in CLIL – it can be very daunting at first, according to the feedback we have been receiving.

**CLIL and Vocational Education and Training in Spain.** When it comes to Vocational Education and Training, only a few regions do have a mandatory CLIL program for all courses. Most of the regions can freely choose whether they include some elements of CLIL in their students' courses or they skip bilingual teaching altogether.

Most regions include some modality of bilingual teaching during Secondary Education for specific schools, though.

In Spain, CLIL is mostly not mandatory in bilingual teaching as the teachers have the freedom to decide how to develop the materials they will be using for their lessons. Again, this might look like a hodgepodge of different methods excessively reliant on the teachers' expertise, but in practice, it mostly works.

When it comes to bilingual teaching in VET, the usual approach in Spain currently is using CLIL only in a few specific subjects (usually the ones that involve more practical knowledge), whereas the rest are taught in Spanish or in a regional language. The teachers involved in the bilingual teaching should have at least a B2 CEFR level in the foreign language, and some regions can provide with a foreign language teacher to assist the "main" teacher during the bilingual lessons.

Against this backdrop the main challenge is the huge difference in the foreign language level in the students. Whereas some students arrive to the Vocational Education and Training school with a decent level of English, others have never studied English whatsoever, or quit studying years before entering the Vocational Education and Training programs. Unfortunately, this drawback is likely to persist in the future, since students enter Vocational Education and Training from very different walks of life, therefore the teachers must take this issue into consideration during their lessons. Scaffolding is paramount to prevent the students with a lower level from feeling frustrated and disconnected from the CLIL lessons altogether. Also, the English level from the teachers could use some improvement, since a significant number of them is not proficient enough. There are many language courses available for teachers all over the country, so hopefully this will help curb the problem satisfactorily.

In this context, our Erasmus+ project might be fairly convenient for teachers tackling CLIL teaching for the first time, as well as for more seasoned professionals. For instance, the framework we developed can be used as a guide for novice teachers, as it includes most of the basic principles of CLIL and a number of tips for teaching in a foreign language specific to Vocational Education and Training.

Moreover, the finished lesson plans that were designed as a result of the dissemination seminars will undoubtedly be very helpful for teachers in search of inspiration for their own lessons. Since these example lesson plans include a wide range of different exercises, each teacher will be able to pick and choose strategies that work best for their subject and students. The material developed during the project could also be very useful for in-service training for our teachers.

### **Good practices for CLIL teachers in Vocational Education and Training.**

During our project, we spoke with many different Vocational Education and Training teachers, most of whom were interested in implementing CLIL in their lessons to some extent. From the dissemination seminars we conducted, we found out that teachers were expecting a ruleset in order to develop their lesson plans, scaffolding another element. There is not an official source for that in Spanish legislation, so we referred to

a framework that was developed during our Erasmus+ project in order to provide some advice for teachers.

As a rule of thumb Spanish teachers must assume they will meet a set of students with very heterogeneous English levels, so they need to be well prepared for that. Scaffolding is therefore key to make sure each of the students can access the subject content. It is strongly recommended that the teacher uses as many resources as possible –audios, videos, authentic reading material in the foreign language... This way the students will be able to get in touch with the reality outside the school and see real-life examples which will be useful for their learning process. Also, a great deal of speaking needs to be involved somehow. Students usually shy away from speaking in a foreign language if they feel their level is too low, but it will be impossible for them to develop any fluency unless they practice.

The activities the students will undertake during the lesson plans should present a wide range of both linguistic and content-specific contents, and a glossary with all the specific vocabulary for each lesson can be extremely useful for the students, because it helps them get ready for all the technical terms they might come across during their reading or listening sessions, for instance.

Of course, the most valuable tip for any teacher beginning their journey on CLIL is embracing flexibility and adapting to the students' level and learning styles. This is the only methodology that ensures a successful learning process for the students.

**Recommendations for Spanish policy makers.** As a result of the feedback from the teachers in several surveys and during the dissemination seminars that took place during our Erasmus+ project's lifespan, some improvements for the Spanish CLIL teaching model were suggested. The biggest challenge for the teachers is making sure all students can access the contents in a foreign language regardless of their prior English knowledge. Hence, a course in English for some students before entering the Vocational Education and Training program seems like a good idea to solve the problem. Also, our teachers felt there were not enough resources available about CLIL so increasing the in-service training courses would undoubtedly be very beneficial. Finally, a more structured set of legal regulations was suggested, since it would provide the teachers with a starting point which could be helpful if they are starting to implement CLIL in their lessons.

**Conclusions.** CLIL teaching in Spain is obviously far from perfect. There are some issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the results for both teachers and students. But in recent years there have been clear improvements and as long as this trend continues, the results will likely get better with time. Bilingual teaching in Vocational Education and Training courses is very dependent on the region the school belongs to, since the educational system and regional peculiarities can influence the outcome and the learning process.

Many Vocational Education and Training teachers feel that starting to work with CLIL is a very intimidating task, not only due to the lack of guidance from the Spanish institutions as there is not a clear programme which can cater to every teacher's needs, but also because the students come to Vocational Education and Training presenting a very diverse set of skills and different foreign language abilities. Therefore, those teachers could use some more structured guidance in order to start adapting their classes to bilingual teaching, using CLIL as a stepping stone in developing new, innovative materials for their subjects.

Our Erasmus+ project can be a good tool to assist teachers interested in applying the CLIL approach in Spain or any other European countries and hopefully the materials we developed will be relevant for anyone interested in teaching Vocational Education and Training subjects through a foreign language now or in the near future.

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