

CLIL methodology as a fusion of language learning and content acquisition. Implementation of CLIL in VET in Romania

Metodologia CLIL jako potencjał łączenia nauki języków obcych i pozyskiwania wiedzy przedmiotowej. Wdrożenie CLIL w kształceniu i szkoleniu zawodowym w Rumunii

Key words: bilingual education, flexibility, content-related objectives, language-related objectives, CLIL, VET.

Abstract: The phenomenon of globalisation has resulted in an increased cooperation and communication across countries and across cultures. As a result, the competences in foreign languages are considered to be vital to successfully engaging and participating in modern life and society. The field of foreign language education is seen as fundamental in this globalized world and, in this context, the two fold nature of CLIL classrooms, i.e. the merging of a foreign language with content subject matter, seems to provide an ideal environment to encourage the dialogue between countries beyond any limits. Moreover, the CLIL technique is known to strengthen the potential for the fusion of language learning and content acquisition, making the CLIL classroom reach out beyond its traditional scope of content-related objectives and aiming for language-related objectives as well.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja dwujęzyczna, elastyczność, cele merytoryczne, cele językowe, CLIL, VET.

Streszczenie. Zjawisko globalizacji spowodowało zwiększenie współpracy i komunikacji między krajami i kulturami. W związku z tym kompetencje w językach obcych są uważane za niezbędne do skutecznego angażowania się i uczestnictwa w nowoczesnym życiu i społeczeństwie. Nauczanie języków obcych jest postrzegane jako podstawowy element kształcenia zawodowego w tym zglobalizowanym świecie. Natomiast dwojaki charakter metodologii CLIL, czyli połączenie nauczania języka obcego z nauczaniem przedmiotu zawodowego, wydaje się stanowić idealne środowisko zachęcające do dialogu między krajami bez żadnych ograniczeń. Ponadto wiadomo, że metodologia CLIL zwiększa potencjał łączenia nauki języków obcych i pozyskiwania wiedzy

przedmiotowej, dzięki czemu CLIL wychodzi poza tradycyjny zakres celów merytorycznych i dąży również do celów językowych.

Background of the CLIL methodology in Romania. As already mentioned above, CLIL describes a teaching and learning approach where subjects are taught and studied through the medium of a non-native, foreign language. The implementation of CLIL methodology in Romanian educational institutions was the concern of a Eurydice report drafted in 2004, which reflected the Romanian realities with respect to CLIL at that moment. “In Romania, the term CLIL has only relatively come into use and has no precise counterpart in Romanian. Two expressions close in meaning correspond to ‘integrated learning of curriculum content and a language’ or ‘learning of subject matter through a foreign language’. Generally, the acronym of the English term is used as it is.” (*Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe. Romania.* p.3). According to this report, in the early 2000’s there was little literature in Romanian on the subject of CLIL, and the most common term referring to this type of provision was *bilingual education* (RO: *învățământ bilingv*). It related to use of the official national language and another language as languages of instruction in an educational institution.

In the following years, more and more studies and researches were dedicated to this issue, so that the terminology and the approaches multiplied. In an academic paper, written by Monica Oprescu from the West University of Timisoara, one can find a synthetic presentation of the evolution of CLIL, regarding the related terminology and the associated contents. “An educational approach that dates back in Antiquity, when Latin was used as language of instruction in European universities, being the language of law, science, theology, philosophy, this is what we nowadays call CLIL/Content and Language Integrated Learning. For a certain extent of time this type of teaching and learning has been out of practice, till recently, 1965, the date at which a language immersion programme in Canada was started. Its aims were to create bilingual citizens, to make learning languages easier and to improve the motivation of the students involved. Content and language integrated learning is considered “a dual focused approach” (Mehisto, Marsh, Frigols 2008), “a fusion of subject didactics, leading to an innovation which emerged as education for modern times” (Coyle, Hood, Marsh 2010:ix), an umbrella term, used for bilingual education, language immersion, CBI – Content Based Instruction, EAL – English as an additional language, LAC – language across the curriculum, intercultural language teaching and learning in practice etc. The language employed is usually English, as the new lingua franca, therefore DaltonPuffer (2011) proposed the term CEIL – Content and English Integrated Learning.” (Oprescu, M., *Cultural Identity through CLIL*, available online)

Romanian National policy on CLIL shows a constant direction which has been established since the 90’s, so it proves to be coherent with national and European strategies issued by the European bodies. CLIL provision is part of mainstream education and it presents at least two main forms, detailed below:

A. CLIL provision combining use of the official language with a modern language can be found in schools usually referred to as *bilingual schools*. Bilingual education is included within the national education network and mainly focuses on the promotion of English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. **The aim** of bilingual education is to raise the level of proficiency in a modern language, particularly through providing opportunities for students to be active in an alternative culture. Bilingual schools exist at upper secondary level which includes 9th to 12th grades, corresponding to pupils aged 15 to 18/19. Most of these schools are supported by the cultural centres and diplomatic missions of countries associated with the linguistic area concerned. Admission of pupils to bilingual schools is based on language tests. In general, bilingual school provision related to a particular modern language is as follows:

- 4 hours a week for teaching the modern language concerned, in all years (9th to 12th grades);
- 1 hour a week for teaching the geography of the corresponding linguistic area, in 9th grade;
- 1 hour a week for teaching the history of the corresponding linguistic area, in 10th grade;
- 1 hour a week for teaching elements of culture and civilization specific to the corresponding linguistic area, in 11th and 12th grades.

On the basis of bilateral agreements between Romania and other countries, the teaching of curriculum content using an alternative language may exceed the number of hours specified above.

B. CLIL provision combining use of the official language with a minority language. In Romania, access to education is guaranteed and administered in such a way as to ensure equal opportunities for all Romanian citizens, regardless of their national origins, sex, race, social status, or political or religious affiliation. The state guarantees the right of persons belonging to ethnic minorities to be taught in their mother tongue. At the same time, all pupils have to learn Romanian. In regions with one or more ethnic minorities, an educational institution normally has to be established for each minority. Schooling in an ethnic minority language is mainly intended for pupils from the minority concerned, but is also open to all those wishing to receive this type of education. Educational provision in an ethnic minority language is based on certain principles considered to be very important, such as the following:

- facilitating the access of ethnic minorities to basic education;
- regularly updating the corresponding curricula, in accordance with new and constantly changing needs;
- developing the skills needed to support the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities in Romania;
- developing the quality of education for ethnic minorities to the same level as in EU countries;
- promoting formative assessment centred on pupil performance;
- ensuring that the educational network for ethnic minorities is of the right dimension;

- providing schools with textbooks and teaching materials in ethnic minority languages.

Within the education system, the Ministry of Education, county school inspectorates and educational institutions are largely responsible for upholding the right of pupils or students from ethnic minorities to education in their mother tongue. As state education is free of charge, expenditure on mother tongue provision in state institutions at pre-primary, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels is covered from public funds.

Specialists in education for ethnic minorities are actively involved in the entire process of implementing educational policies and reform, as well as in the preparation of the curriculum, school textbooks and teaching materials. Educational institutions may cover the entire curriculum in a minority language (except the subjects of Romanian history, geography and language), or just some subjects or, yet again, solely the study of the minority language and the history and traditions of the minority concerned. Religion may also be studied in the language of an ethnic minority in all years.

Education for ethnic minority groups has a long tradition in Romania, despite the fact that during the communist period it was dramatically reduced especially at upper secondary and tertiary levels. Since 1990, education provided in the languages of ethnic minorities has been steadily developed, to cover all minorities in the country. (*Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe. Romania.* available online)

Multilingualism and minority languages in Romania, developed in 2009 by a series of linguists under the high patronage of the Romanian Academy, financed by the General Secretariat of the Romanian Government, supported by the Representative of the European Commission in Romania offers an overview of the existing information on the minority languages spoken in Romania, placed in the larger context of the European multilingual diversity and linguistic heritage. It is based on the available literature, official documents and data obtained from users of the minority languages currently spoken in Romania. The paper starts with a general presentation of the various languages spoken on the European territory, from the point of view of their origin, structure and status, as the European linguistic heritage is characterized by a mix of official, regional and minority languages. This part of the research also includes a definition of multilingualism, from a social and linguistic perspective, and an overview of the main policies and programmes for the preservation of minority languages, at the level of the European Union and of the Council of Europe. It sums up a series of initiatives, such as the extensive study of minority language groups carried out by the European Commission (Euromosaic), as well as the latest developments of the EU policy in the field of multilingualism and the objectives of The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, ratified by Romania in October 2007. The second part of the study gives an account of the languages spoken in Romania, starting with an overview of the evolution of the Romanian language and its dialects. This is followed by a detailed description of the minority languages spoken in Romania and of the measures

adopted to promote them according to The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Special attention is given in particular to the presentation of the minority language teaching in the current educational system. The paper ends with a series of recommendations for the use of minority languages in the field of education, media, culture, administration, justice, as reflected in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Second opinion on Romania of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. On the basis of the information provided, several considerations and proposals have been made for encouraging the protection and enhancement of the linguistic heritage in Romania. (available online at <http://www.dri.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Multilinguism-si-limbi-minoritare-in-Romania.pdf>)

CLIL teachers' profile in Romania. The qualifications and specialized training of teachers involved in CLIL are regulated by the Law of Education in force in Romania. Bilingual education is generally provided at upper secondary level. Teachers involved in this type of provision are either native speakers of the target language used for purposes of communication and capable of demonstrating their proficiency in it, or qualified to teach foreign languages in mainstream education and have satisfactorily completed in-service training modules related to the geography, history, civilization and culture of the linguistic area concerned. This in-service training is usually provided by specialized training centres. Teachers who have specialized in other subjects may also participate in language training courses.

In Romania, education for minorities is available at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. Pre-primary and primary school teachers are trained in secondary schools and in colleges for teacher education.

CLIL methodological approaches in Romania: best practices. The constant interest of the teachers of foreign languages in implementing the latest methodologies, including CLIL, is proved not only by their practice, but also by the academic papers issued recently. In an article devoted to this issue, Georgiana Soficu explores “to what extent the educational approach represented by CLIL engages students in language learning and its impact on motivation in language acquisition” (Soficu, *Content language integrated learning in teaching English. Engaging young learners through CLIL*, available online). The author also outlines how CLIL could be used to attain “authenticity of purpose” (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010) and provide a better vehicle for authentic language exposure and production in English as a Foreign Language context. Overall, the paper provides insights into CLIL’s methodology as well as into some major CLIL practices. The conclusion is rather a recommendation that arises from the effective use of CLIL activities, so the author advocates the implementation of CLIL courses because of the rich opportunities and positive effects they can have on the classroom and on the learner’s experience of learning the target language.

Another academic paper, issued by Monica Oprescu from the West University of Timisoara, highlights a different aspect of CLIL methodology, i.e. its role in defining and refining the cultural identity. The focus of this paper is a case study that shows what impact use of CLIL methodology has upon shaping the cultural identity of the students. The CLIL approach, a modern manner of teaching English has been adapted in Romanian schools and universities. An interesting aspect of learning a foreign language is the contact with its culture/s and the changes it produces in terms of identity. Therefore, a challenging question to be answered is whether a CLIL approach focusing on culture influences students' cultural identity and the case study shows that there is a tight connection between them. (Oprescu, *Cultural Identity Through CLIL* available online)

The C4C project (*CLIL for Children*), launched on September 1, 2015, aims at supporting primary school teachers with a comprehensive training program for CLIL teaching. The consortium of the C4C project, which included the University of Pitesti, developed a set of open resources and materials which address to primary school teachers, but the main product is the *Guide Addressed to Teachers on how to use CLIL Methodology in Primary Schools*. It is based on several previous outputs of the project and it summarizes the main findings of the researches, representing a list of good practices and providing practical worksheets in order to help teachers plan CLIL learning activities with students, to observe students' behaviour and learning and to monitor the results of CLIL learning sequences (available online).

One of the most interesting projects in which an institution from Romania was partner is *PlayingCLIL*, a truly welcome addition to CLIL practices with creativity at its core. The specific of this project is that it aims at combining CLIL with other modern and rather unusual methods and activities. Exploring language and thinking through stories, games, humour and drama provides learners with opportunities to actively co-construct meaning and to 'language' their thinking in creative ways. The Handbook which resulted of the project uses a game-based principled approach to CLIL. It offers many practical, adaptable ideas to support teachers in providing language-rich, cognitively challenging, interactive and creative experiences for their learners. Game-based learning has a significant contribution to use CLIL to enable learners and teachers to enjoy learning, as well as to actively explore and create their own successful plurilingual and pluricultural experiences. (www.playingclil.eu/)

CLIL-VET: Implementing the CLIL-VET model in vocational schools.

The concept of CLIL is increasingly gaining recognition in Romanian educational institutions, and, in this line, CLIL in VET is considered to be an innovative approach to teaching precisely because of its connection between the CLIL method and vocational training. The focus of the present project, implemented in Romania as well, is precisely this intention to enhance the correlation between specific content and foreign language competence as a key to a better future professional development.

Within the framework of our project, the possibility of applying CLIL in VET was introduced to Romanian teachers during the dissemination seminars organized on 28–29 November 2018 as “the practice of applying CLIL in Vocational and Work-based education for the purpose of learning a trade and developing key language competences” (*CLIL-VET Framework*). The event had a theoretical layer, represented by this comprehensively-designed *CLIL-VET Framework*, and a practical one, which mainly involved the design and, later on, the implementation of lesson scenarios on the topic allotted to the University of Pitesti (Services and Economics: Economics, Business Administration, Communication, Competition, HACCP). As a means of testing the efficiency and attractiveness of the lesson scenarios in real-life contexts, they were piloted on the field by 10 teachers in 5 high schools (The Technological Highschool Vedeia, “Armand Călinescu” Technical College, “Maria Teiuleanu” College of Economy, No 1 Technological Highschool, Maracineni, “Liviu Rebreanu” Technological Highschool, Mozaceni) from Arges County, Romania. The main objective of the activity was testing the collection of lesson plans based on CLIL methodology, designed for vocational education in the field of services and economics.

Within this context, CLIL-VET methodology was considered an interdisciplinary method meant to increase the efficiency and attractiveness of the various types of content delivered in the Romanian curricula and, as a consequence, the teachers involved in this activity considered it to be an essential tool for promoting this type of teaching activities in every day classes in the respective field of interest. In addition, the CLIL methodology was considered to provide an integration of cognitive skills with language skills, thus responding to the needs of the beneficiaries of education. The flexibility of CLIL is taken note of and the teaching scenarios can be tailored to the peculiarities of the student group, but taking also into account the need to involve the teacher in managing the tasks requirements, to provide the language frameworks.

The Romanian teachers manifested their interest in using the CLIL-VET methodology on an even wider scale at their classes as they considered it to be a successful means of stirring their students’ interest and of equipping them with both the necessary content and language knowledge necessary for their integration on the international labour force market. In order for the didactic process to be effective, however, there is a strong need to resort to adequate learning materials to be used in such lessons, which, at the moment, is rather difficult to accomplish and requires a solid research.

In point of challenges encountered during the process, the 10 teachers who piloted the CLIL-VET lesson plans have not reported major difficulties regarding the implementation process. However, some of them pointed out specific aspects related to students’ language skills, which means that the level of their foreign language knowledge needs to be improved in order to be able to work adequately with the concepts in the domain of economy and services. This aspect could be considered positive and important because the students grew aware of the relevance of English as a *lingua franca*, necessary for their future integration into the labour market. Most importantly, it became obvious that the CLIL methodology could have a significant

impact on promoting both foreign language and content knowledge to students and the teachers involved in piloting reported their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the CLIL methodology on the students' attitude towards education. Therefore, the general idea is that CLIL is indeed an issue that can arouse both educators' and students' interest.

Country Recommendations. A better promotion of the advantages brought by implementing the CLIL-VET methodology in the Romanian educational and social environment would be stimulated by national regulations in the field of education in general and in the field of Vocational education in particular. A preliminary step in this direction would be to perform a needs' analysis both in terms of employers' requirements and students' competences. This correlation of the Romanian educational climate with the legislation in force would guarantee a better integration of Romanian students in the international labour market. In addition, Romanian educational legislation should be made consistent with the European legislation in the field so as to make sure that students graduating in different European countries are provided with similar training and opportunities in their field of interest.

Furthermore, raising the students' and students' associations' awareness as regards the benefits of using the CLIL-VET methodology in the Romanian educational setting would be an effective strategy to facilitate their adaptation to the requirements of the European (and not only) labour market.

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