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ENHANCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH CLIL METHODOLOGY

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Abstract. The article provides a comprehensive exploration of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology, shedding light on its foundational principles, myriad benefits, and practical implementation strategies. The dual focus of CLIL on both content and language acquisition serves as the cornerstone of its transformative potential, offering a unique approach to foreign language proficiency. The article meticulously examines the theoretical underpinnings of CLIL, emphasizing its role in fostering cognitive benefits and positive language outcomes. Drawing on insights from successful CLIL programs, it highlights the tangible impacts of integrating language learning with content, propelling learners toward a heightened linguistic competence. Case studies of educational institutions that have embraced CLIL contribute real-world perspectives, featuring testimonials from teachers, students, and administrators alike. Common concerns and misconceptions surrounding CLIL are addressed, providing clarity on how this methodology can be adapted to various educational settings. Practical implications for teachers are elucidated, offering valuable insights into incorporating CLIL seamlessly into foreign language classrooms. The article also explores the future implications and emerging trends within CLIL methodology, contemplating its potential influence on the future landscape of foreign language education. This article advocates for the continued exploration and adoption of CLIL as a dynamic and effective educational approach. By delving into the depths of CLIL's theoretical foundations, showcasing its practical successes, and envisioning its future trajectory, this article seeks to inspire teachers to embrace CLIL as a transformative force in enhancing foreign language acquisition in the 21st century.

Keywords: CLIL methodology, foreign language acquisition, language proficiency, communicative competence, integration, primary education, secondary education, higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by an unprecedented level of global connectivity. Nowadays, the acquisition of foreign languages has transcended its former status as a desirable skill, evolving into an indispensable asset for individuals navigating the complexities of our integrated global society. As the dynamics of our rapidly changing global environment underscore the critical importance of cross-cultural communication, teachers and language professionals are turning to innovative methodologies to address these evolving demands.

Within this context, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology emerges as a dynamic and forward-thinking approach situated at the intersection of language acquisition and academic content. It represents a paradigm shift in language education, responding to the need for

learners not only to master a foreign language but also to seamlessly integrate language skills with the complexities of various academic subjects. In essence, CLIL becomes a bridge between linguistic competence and intellectual engagement, fostering a comprehensive and interconnected approach to learning.

This article seeks to illuminate the foundations of CLIL, providing an in-depth exploration into its principles and methodology. Emphasizing the crucial role of foreign language proficiency, the article delves into the ways in which CLIL methodology can significantly enhance the process of acquiring a foreign language. By navigating this educational landscape, we aim to offer insights into the transformative potential of CLIL, demonstrating its capacity to empower learners with not just linguistic proficiency but also the cognitive tools necessary to thrive in an ever-evolving global society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW, GENERALIZATION OF MAIN STATEMENTS

2.1. Understanding CLIL Methodology

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology represents a revolutionary educational approach that transcends conventional language education.

CLIL seamlessly intertwines language learning with subject content, providing a holistic learning experience. It goes beyond the traditional language classroom, creating an immersive environment where students engage with content-rich subjects in the target language. This methodology is not just about teaching a language; it's about using the language "as a medium of instruction for different subjects at all educational stages" (Arnó & Mancho-Barés, as cited in Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smith, 2010, p. 1).

CLIL is distinctive for its "dual-focused educational approach in which a foreign language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, p. 1), emphasizing both the mastery of academic content and the development of language proficiency. Unlike traditional language classes that often isolate language from other subjects, CLIL encourages teachers to integrate language skills into the broader curriculum. CLIL is an approach that helps students acquire not only language competence, but also a deep understanding of diverse subjects, fostering a symbiotic relationship between language and content acquisition.

The integration of language learning with subject content in CLIL yields multifaceted benefits. Students not only learn to communicate effectively in the target language but also gain insights into various disciplines. Since the students are provided "with all the assistance needed to comprehend, produce and negotiate academic messages in the target language" (Escobar Urmeneta, 2011, p. 203-204), this integration fosters critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a more profound understanding of the subject content. Moreover, it creates a context where language is not an isolated skill, but a tool for meaningful communication and knowledge acquisition.

2.2. The Role of CLIL in Foreign Language Acquisition

CLIL marks a departure from conventional language teaching methods by breaking down the barriers between language and content. Unlike traditional language classes that often focus solely on vocabulary and grammar, CLIL immerses learners in authentic, content-rich experiences, enabling the students to "learn to use language and use language to learn" (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008, p. 26). It is worth mentioning that in CLIL "the non-language subject is not taught in a foreign language, but

with and through a foreign language" (Eurydice, 2006, p. 8). It recognizes that language is best acquired in meaningful contexts, making the learning process more engaging, relevant, and effective.

One of the defining features of CLIL is its emphasis on using real-world content as a vehicle for language acquisition. By integrating language learning with academic subjects such as science, history, or mathematics, CLIL creates a natural and purposeful context in which "languages are not learned first and then used, but they are learned by being used" (Cenoz, 2015, p. 17). This approach mirrors the way language is naturally acquired in daily life, as individuals communicate about meaningful topics. As a result, learners not only grasp the intricacies of the language, but also develop specialized vocabulary and communication skills in the context of various subjects.

Around the globe, teachers are embracing CLIL with remarkable success. In European countries, where CLIL has become very important in the internationalization of higher education, students are engaged in bilingual programs, allowing them to absorb complex concepts while simultaneously enhancing their language proficiency. Additionally, international schools and language immersion programs have successfully implemented CLIL, showcasing its versatility in various educational settings.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Benefits and Outcomes

The adoption of CLIL methodology in foreign language education yields a number of positive impacts on language acquisition. Studies consistently show that learners exposed to CLIL "could be more gifted and motivated to learn English as a foreign language than their non-CLIL counterparts" (Lasagabaster, 2008, p. 38). Thus, they demonstrate enhanced language proficiency, including improved listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The immersive nature of CLIL allows students to acquire language naturally, resulting in greater fluency and communicative competence.

Beyond language proficiency, CLIL develops cognitive skills that extend far beyond the language classroom. CLIL is an approach which helps "transform knowledge into understanding" (Hansen-Pauly, as cited in Strotmann & Bamond et. al., 2014, p. 92). By engaging with content-rich subjects, students are challenged to think critically, analyse information, and solve problems in various contexts. This cognitive engagement not only fortifies their language skills but also hones their ability to apply knowledge across disciplines. CLIL learners develop a versatile skill set that transcends language acquisition, fostering analytical thinking, adaptability, and a deeper understanding of complex concepts.

CLIL is practically the only dual-focus approach aiming at integrated learning, including cultural awareness as one of its essential components. CLIL also adjusts to the cultural context (the cultural expectations of people engaged – learners, teachers, and communities) of the location where it is applied, making it a universe approach (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

Moreover, this exploration aligns with Coyle's 4Cs Framework (Coyle, as cited in Strotmann & Bamond et al., 2014, p. 93), asserting that culture and communication play pivotal roles in the determinants of language learning within the CLIL setting. By acknowledging these integral components, CLIL not only enhances linguistic competence, but also fosters a deeper appreciation for cultural nuances and effective communication, thereby enriching the educational experience.

The 4Cs Framework suggests that effective CLIL takes place through (Coyle, 2006):
–   The development of knowledge and skills in the subject (content).

–   The usage of a foreign language to learn the subject and vice versa (communication).

–   The development of logical thinking, including abstract thinking, and the ability to combine the acquired knowledge with the expression of one's own thoughts in a foreign language (cognition).

–   The development of alternative directions of learning the content as well as deepening the student's self-awareness and understanding of others, and the world in general (culture).

From this perspective, "CLIL involves learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively" (Coyle, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, one of the key learning outcomes of CLIL is an understanding of the diversity around, what your own culture is and how to communicate with representatives of different cultural background. In addition, students have the opportunity to better comprehend and understand the culture of the language being studied, which leads to the development of socio-cultural competence of students. The student passes through a fairly large amount of language material, which is a full immersion in the natural language environment. As a result, the essential for modern world multicultural competence is learnt through natural inclusive recognizing of the diversity by combining techniques in a CLIL classroom.

3.2. Practical Implementation

CLIL, situated at the intersection of language acquisition and academic content, demands a meticulous approach to ensure its effective integration. The CLIL strategies encompass curriculum design alignment, language support methodologies, varied teaching materials, collaborative learning initiatives, language assessment strategies, and professional development for teachers. Furthermore, it is underscored the significance of technology integration, community engagement, continuous feedback, and inclusive approaches to enhance CLIL experiences. This pragmatic framework aims to empower teachers with the tools needed to seamlessly integrate CLIL into their classrooms, fostering a holistic learning environment that cultivates both language proficiency and subject content expertise.

In the realm of effective teaching practices, the integration of some methodological principles becomes crucial. These principles encompass diverse aspects, including curriculum design, instructional strategies, assessment methods, and the cultivation of a positive learning atmosphere. To enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching and to contribute to the holistic development of students the following methodological principles should be incorporated (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008):

–   *Positive learning environment*. It refers to a context that fosters a constructive and supportive atmosphere conducive to effective learning and personal development. It encompasses various elements that collectively contribute to creating an atmosphere where learners feel motivated, engaged, and safe. A positive learning environment sets the setting for effective education, encouraging intellectual curiosity, creativity, and the overall well-being of learners. It plays a crucial role in shaping a positive attitude toward learning, fostering a lifelong love for knowledge acquisition.

–   *Active learning*. It is an educational approach that engages students in the learning process through activities that encourage them to participate, analyse, and reflect on the content. Active learning emphasizes student involvement and collaboration. It is based on the belief that students learn more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process, fostering a deeper understanding and retention of information. This approach aligns with modern educational theories that emphasize student-centred, experiential, and collaborative learning.

– *Scaffolding*. It refers to a supportive framework or structure provided by teachers to help students as they learn new concepts, skills, or tasks. Scaffolding provides temporary support to learners, gradually reducing assistance as they become more proficient. It is a dynamic and responsive teaching strategy that recognizes the importance of providing support tailored to individual learners. By offering the right level of assistance at the right time, teachers aim at empowering students to master new skills and concepts.

– *Authentic learning*. It is an educational approach that emphasizes real-world, meaningful activities and tasks to engage students in practical, hands-on experiences. The goal is to connect classroom learning to authentic, relevant situations, making the educational experience more meaningful and applicable to students' lives. Authentic learning aligns with the idea that education should provide students not just with knowledge, but also with the ability to apply the knowledge in authentic, diverse, and unpredictable situations they may encounter in their personal and professional lives.

– *Multiple focuses*. It refers to situations or contexts where attention, emphasis, or concentration are distributed across several different areas, aspects, or subjects. Multiple focuses highlight the integrated nature of content and language learning, emphasizing the simultaneous development of subject-specific knowledge and language proficiency. This approach aims at creating a holistic learning experience that benefits students cognitively, linguistically, and academically.

Taking into account provided methodological principles we would like to outline some practical tips for teachers when integrating CLIL into their classes:

– Choose content that aligns with both language learning objectives and the academic curriculum. This ensures that language acquisition is contextual and purposeful.

– Clearly define language objectives alongside content objectives. This helps focus on language development within the context of the subject content.

– Incorporate a variety of authentic materials such as articles, videos, and interactive resources to expose learners to diverse language styles and registers.

– Foster collaborative learning experiences to enhance language acquisition. Group projects and discussions provide opportunities for students to communicate in the target language.

– Offer language scaffolding through glossaries, visual aids, and language models. This helps students comprehend and express complex ideas in the foreign language.

While integrating CLIL into their classes educators might face some challenges. In order to overcome them teachers should:

– Address varying language proficiency levels within the classroom by implementing differentiated instruction strategies. Pairing more proficient students with those at lower proficiency levels can create a supportive learning environment.

– Break down complex content into manageable chunks and scaffold language accordingly. This helps students grasp both the language and content more effectively.

– Integrate CLIL activities seamlessly into the existing curriculum to address time constraints. This can involve incorporating shorter, focused CLIL lessons or integrating CLIL elements into regular lessons.

Finally, we would like to provide practical guidance for teachers looking to implement CLIL in foreign language classrooms. Teachers can use the following CLIL lesson activities to seamlessly integrate CLIL methodology into their teaching practices:

    – *Language Immersion Day*. Teachers can designate a day where all classroom communication, instruction, and activities are conducted exclusively in the foreign language. This immersive experience enhances language acquisition through practical application.

    – *Subject-Specific Projects*. Teachers can assign projects that require students to research, present, and write reports in the foreign language. This not only reinforces language skills, but also deepens their understanding of the subject.

    – *Multilingual Debates*. Teachers can organize debates on relevant topics, encouraging students to communicate and defend their viewpoints in the foreign language. This promotes critical thinking and effective communication.

Thus, implementing CLIL requires teachers to align content and language objectives, incorporate authentic materials, foster collaboration, and provide language scaffolding. Overcoming challenges through differentiated instruction and seamless integration into existing curricula is essential. Successful implementation hinges on teachers creatively adapting CLIL principles to their contexts, fostering a more integrated and effective approach to language learning and subject comprehension.

3.3. Addressing Common Concerns

As the adoption of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology gains momentum, teachers may express legitimate concerns and misconceptions about its implementation. Addressing these common concerns is essential to foster a nuanced understanding of CLIL and its potential impact on language education. Here are some common concerns and responses to alleviate them:

    – *Some teachers worry that focusing on subject content might compromise language learning*. The symbiotic nature of CLIL should be highlighted, emphasizing that content and language are mutually reinforcing. CLIL enhances both language proficiency and subject understanding.

    – *Teachers may fear that CLIL could exacerbate proficiency gaps among students.* It should be advocated for differentiated instruction within CLIL classrooms, ensuring that language support is provided to address varying proficiency levels.

    – *Teachers may express concerns about time constraints within a curriculum*. It should be showcased how CLIL activities can be seamlessly integrated into existing lesson plans, illustrating that even short, focused CLIL sessions can yield significant benefits.

It should be noted that the symbiotic nature of CLIL, where content and language mutually reinforce each other, is emphasized to alleviate concerns about compromising language learning. The importance of differentiated instruction within CLIL classrooms is advocated to address fears of exacerbating proficiency gaps, ensuring tailored language support for varying proficiency levels. Additionally, CLIL activities can be seamlessly integrated into existing lesson plans, dispelling concerns about time constraints. While acknowledging concerns, the responses highlight the adaptability and effectiveness of CLIL in enhancing both language proficiency and subject understanding.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology exhibits a remarkable adaptability that allows its seamless integration into diverse educational settings and levels. This adaptability is not a

one-size-fits-all solution but a flexible approach that caters to the unique demands and characteristics of various educational environments:

–   *Primary Education*. At the primary level, CLIL can be tailored to align with the developmental stages of younger learners. Utilizing storytelling, interactive games, and hands-on activities, CLIL makes language acquisition both enjoyable and effective.

–   *Secondary Education*. In secondary education, CLIL strategies can become more sophisticated. Subject-specific projects, collaborative discussions, and deeper integration of language and content prepare students for the academic challenges ahead.

–   *Higher Education*. CLIL can be integrated into specialized courses at the tertiary level, encouraging students to engage with complex subject content in the foreign language. Practical applications relevant to their future professions enhance the learning experience.

By addressing common concerns and highlighting the adaptability of CLIL across diverse educational settings, teachers can feel more confident in implementing this methodology. CLIL's flexibility allows it to be tailored to the unique needs and challenges of different learning environments, making it a versatile and effective approach to foreign language acquisition.

3.4. Future Implications and Trends

As we navigate the dynamic landscape of language education, the future implications and emerging trends of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology stand as pivotal considerations. In the time shaped by technological advancements, globalization, and evolving educational paradigms, exploring the trajectory of CLIL unveils its potential impact on language acquisition and interdisciplinary learning (Morton, 2023, p. 530-531):

–   *Increasing interdisciplinary collaboration*. It marks a paradigm shift towards a more comprehensive and interconnected language learning experience. This evolution not only deepens language proficiency, but also equips learners with the analytical and communicative skills essential for navigating the intricacies of a diverse and interconnected world.

–   *Further intensification of functional and semiotic perspectives on language in CLIL*. It represents a paradigm shift towards a more holistic, dynamic, and contextually rich approach to language learning. This evolution positions CLIL as an educational framework that not only equips learners with linguistic competence, but also nurtures their ability to engage meaningfully within the complex communicative and symbolic realms of diverse academic disciplines.

–   *Growing interest in advancing teachers' knowledge base for CLIL integration*. It reflects a commitment to the refinement and enhancement of CLIL methodology. As models and frameworks for CLIL teacher education continue to evolve, teachers are poised to play a pivotal role in fostering a transformative and enriched learning experience for students within the realm of CLIL.

–   *Increasing interest in the conceptual bases and practical approaches to assessment in CLIL.* It is indicative of a commitment to refining and optimizing the integration of content and language learning. As teachers delve deeper into conceptual frameworks and implement innovative assessment methodologies, CLIL assessment practices are poised to become more nuanced, comprehensive, and reflective of the dynamic nature of integrated language and content education.

–   *Increasing interest in questions of elitism, equity, and diversity in CLIL*. It signifies a commitment to critically examining the social implications of language-integrated education. By addressing these

concerns, teachers aim at creating CLIL environments that are accessible, equitable, and offer the rich diversity of learners, fostering inclusive and empowering educational experiences for everybody.

As CLIL continues to evolve, these future implications are poised to shape the landscape of foreign language learning. They herald a transformative epoch where language education transcends traditional boundaries. By integrating language with content, fostering cultural awareness, and addressing contemporary challenges, CLIL stands as a beacon guiding the evolution of language education towards a more relevant, engaging, and interconnected future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) emerges not only as a methodology, but also as a transformative paradigm in foreign language education. As we have journeyed through the various facets of CLIL methodology, it becomes evident that its unique blend of content immersion and language acquisition presents a powerful approach to enhancing language proficiency and fostering academic excellence. CLIL is not merely a methodology; it is a catalyst for breaking down linguistic barriers, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and preparing learners for a globalized world. Its importance lies in the comprehensive development it offers, where language becomes a tool for meaningful communication, critical thinking, and academic success.

For teachers, CLIL opens avenues for innovative teaching approaches, enriching their educational practices and fostering professional growth. For students, it provides a dynamic learning environment that goes beyond language acquisition, nurturing a deeper understanding of diverse subjects and enhancing their readiness for future academic and professional challenges.

In embracing CLIL, we embrace not only a methodology, but also a vision – an approach that not only enriches language skills, but also cultivates global citizens equipped with the knowledge and communication tools to thrive in an integrated global society.

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У статті представлено комплексне дослідження предметно-мовного інтегрованого навчання (CLIL), висвітлюючи його ключові принципи, численні переваги й практичні стратегії впровадження. Подвійний фокус CLIL методики як на зміст предмету, так і на вивчення мови є наріжним каменем його трансформаційного потенціалу, пропонуючи унікальний підхід до вивчення іноземної мови. У статті розглянуто теоретичні основи CLIL, підкреслюючи його роль у сприянні когнітивним перевагам і позитивним мовним результатам. З опертям на результати успішно імплементованих програм CLIL, у статті підкреслено відчутні наслідки інтеграції вивчення мови зі змістом предмету, сприяючи підвищенню лінгвістичної компетентності учнів. Висновки навчальних закладів, які імплементували CLIL, описують реальну ситуацію, презентуючи відгуки викладачів, студентів і адміністрації. У статті розглянуто поширені проблеми й неправильні уявлення щодо CLIL, пояснюючи, як цю методологію можна адаптувати до різних навчальних контекстів. Окреслено практичне застосування для викладачів, пропонуючи цінну інформацію про безпроблемне впровадження CLIL в класи іноземних мов. У статті також досліджено майбутні перспективи й нові тенденції в методології CLIL, розглядаючи її потенційний вплив на майбутній контекст вивчення іноземних мов. Стаття сприяє подальшому дослідженню й впровадженню CLIL як динамічного й ефективного освітнього підходу. Заглиблюючись у глибини теоретичних основ CLIL, демонструючи його практичні успіхи й уявляючи його майбутню траєкторію, автори статті прагнуть надихнути викладачів сприймати CLIL як трансформаційну силу.

Ключові слова: предметно-мовне інтегроване навчання, CLIL, вивчення іноземної мови, знання іноземної мови, комунікативна компетентність, інтеграція, початкова освіта, середня освіта, вища освіта.