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Investigación e innovación en lengua extranjera: Una perspectiva global

Research and Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching: A Global Perspective

Juan Ramón Guijarro Ojeda
Raúl Ruiz Cecilia



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Research and Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching:
A Global Perspective

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A global perspective

JUAN RAMÓN GUIJARRO OJEDA
RAÚL RUIZ CECILIA
Editores

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SELF-ASSESSMENT OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' COMPETENCES AND TEACHING NON- LINGUISTIC SUBJECT THROUGH A CLIL APPROACH

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Abstract

In the Italian school system, the compulsory teaching of at least one curriculum discipline in a foreign language through Content and Language Integrated Learning mode (CLIL) (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010) was introduced with the reorganization of the upper secondary school in 2010 (Decrees No 87, 88, 89/2010). Teachers of the non-linguistic disciplines concerned are required to take part in specific training courses carried out by the universities, aimed at acquiring the CLIL methodology. For the academic year 2018/2019, the Department of Languages, Literatures, Intercultural Studies, Education and Psychology (SCIFOPSI) at the University of Florence was entrusted with the realization of three courses in which about 100 upper secondary school teachers in service at high schools, technical and professional institutes participated. This paper presents an empirical survey carried out with a sample. The aim is to bring out self-assessment competences in non-linguistic curricular disciplines teaching (the Italian acronym is DNL) using the CLIL methodology (Danielson, McGreal, 2000). The survey uses a research design with pre-post-test by means of a structured questionnaire (Beraux, Coonan, Frigols-Martin,

Mehisto, 2010) administered to teachers at the beginning and at the end of the CLIL methodological courses. The preliminary results refer exclusively to the initial phase of the pre-test. They will be later correlated with the results to highlight the improvement to be pursued using the CLIL methodology, both in disciplinary content and L2 linguistic skills development (Herrarte, Belouqui, 2015; Sercu, 2006). The research has shown the area of competence where teachers' perception is lower and has indicated the need to further inform training paths to strengthen the theoretical methodological principles and the teaching practices of the CLIL approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an empirical survey drawing on data collected from a sample of Italian upper secondary school teachers attending compulsory courses to teach subjects using the CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*) approach (Coyle et al., 2010; Grenfell et al, 2004; Toch, Rothman, 2008). It aims to focus on the role of self-assessment competences for non-linguistic disciplines (the Italian acronym is DNL) teaching using CLIL methodology as part of training courses at the University of Florence (Italy) during the academic year 2018/2019. The upper secondary school in service teachers involved were about 100 from high schools, technical and professional institutes. Adopting European policies, in 2010 the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) introduced the teaching of a non-linguistic subject (DNL) in a foreign language in the last year of high schools and technical institutes and of two non-linguistic subjects in a foreign language in the linguistic high schools starting from the third and fourth year. The foreign language of reference was mainly English. The MIUR activated both language and methodological courses to allow interested teachers to achieve B2 and C1 CEFR levels (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Council of Europe, 2001; Little, 2005), entrusting Universities with their implementation.

The research aims to verify the following objectives: (i) inquire into the perception of the teachers attending the courses about their CLIL methodological competences; (ii) assess the effectiveness of the courses organized by the university with regard to the development of competencies in the CLIL methodology. It reports the data related to the first objective, the teachers' self-assessment competences acquisition in the initial phase of the research. The second objective will be

developed in a further phase of the research focusing on the University courses effectiveness.

The article is organized as follows: the introduction defines the problem addressed. Section 2 presents CLIL theoretical framework with particular attention to recent developments. Section 3 is dedicated to the survey description and the research methodology. The survey is based on a pre-post-test research design using an internationally validated structured questionnaire. Discussion of the collected data is proposed in section 4 where the lower areas of teachers' competence perceptions are highlighted, and specific training is proposed to enhance the theoretical and didactic knowledge of the CLIL approach for an effective professional development of upper secondary school teachers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CLIL APPROACH

Content and Language Integrated Language represents a well-established approach to foster European citizens' multilingualism in mainstream education systems in Europe and other countries where language is used as a medium for teaching the content of school subjects. When following up the *European Recommendations on Key Citizenship Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2006, 2018) and *Education and Training* programs by European Commissions, particular attention has been dedicated to the learning of foreign languages as means of strengthening European citizenship and the formation of a pluri-linguistic society (Gibbons, 2002; Grenfell et al., 2003; Guijarro Ojeda & Ruiz Cecilia, 2005).

CLIL was considered effective in improving foreign language learning (Lasagabaster, 2008; Lasagabaster, Sierra, 2009). Compared to traditional methods of language teaching, CLIL consists in a close relationship or integration between content and language. It is a content-driven approach (Dalton-Puffer, 2013) where greater attention is devoted to fluency rather than accuracy. One of the issues that characterize it is "language immersion" (Cummins, 1976; 1979) that requires the acquisition of socio- linguistic skills at both the informal communicative level (*Basic Interpersonal*

Communication Skills, BICS) and the specialized-disciplinary level (*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*, CALP). While the focus of research was initially on the linguistic aspects (Marsh et al., 2012), in recent years it has been more focused on interdisciplinary aspects (Coyle et al., 2010) and on the study of learning strategies in a CLIL context. To increase the effectiveness of the approach, more attention has been paid to the co- construction of knowledge, which requires participation, collaboration, interaction and laboratory activities, functional and systemic use of foreign language in interaction (Lopes & Ruiz Cecilia, 2019; Meyer et al., 2015), since CLIL cannot be reduced to the mere linguistic translation of content from one language to another.

3. AN IN-FIELD RESEARCH ON TEACHERS ATTENDING CLIL COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY

3.1. *Survey description*

Interest in foreign languages occurred also in Italy and gave rise to a series of ongoing innovations such as the teaching of non-linguistic subjects using a CLIL approach that became mandatory in the last classes of upper secondary schools from 2010. As a logical consequence, linguistically and methodologically well-prepared teachers were required, and Universities were involved in the training process. The Department of Formation, Languages, Intercultural, Literature and Psychology at the University of Florence was assigned the task of planning three courses for about 100 upper secondary school teachers. The courses had a total duration of 120 hours, divided into 65 hours of lessons in attendance, 43 hours for distance learning and 12 hours of direct training in schools.

The present research aimed to investigate self-assessment competences in non- linguistic curricular disciplines teaching using the CLIL methodology (Danielson, McGreal, 2000). The survey uses a research design with pre and and post-test by means of a structured questionnaire (Beraux, Coonan, Frigols-Martin, Mehisto, 2010) administered to teachers at the beginning and at the end of the CLIL methodological courses. To investigate the first objective regarding the teachers'

perception and self- assessment about their CLIL competences at the beginning of the course, specific areas have been investigated aiming at revealing critical aspects in the previous training and orienting the following accordingly.

3.2. *The research design*

The research hypothesis was intended to verify whether the course contributed to increasing teachers' perception of an effective use of the CLIL methodology, through an integrated teaching of disciplinary contents and linguistic structures. For the purposes of the internal validity of the research, it was considered appropriate to ascertain only the initial perception of the teachers in order to compare it with the post-test data in a further step. Therefore, the results analysed in the next paragraph refer exclusively to the pre-test phase. The research was conducted using a pre-post-test design with a non-equivalent group: the treatment group was represented by all the teachers enrolled in university courses (Cook et al., 2002; Lucisano, Salerni, 2002)

A semi-structured questionnaire, *The CLIL Teachers' Competence Grid* (Bertaux, Coonan, Frigols-Martin, Mehisto, 2010) adapted for the Italian context, was used to (i) detect teachers' perception of their competence degree; (ii) identify the professional needs of teachers necessary to structure CLIL lessons. The tool consists of two sections: the first, "Underpinning CLIL", investigates the skills related to this specific methodological approach and the relationships between stakeholders necessary to achieve an effective design of CLIL paths; the second, "Setting CLIL in motion", focuses on how to structure and implement CLIL training processes. Only the former was used for the purpose of the research. The questionnaire was filled in anonymously but with the attribution of an identification code for the subsequent phase of the research. The variables have been observed by mono-variate analysis both individually and with respect to average values. The next step will be dedicated to the longitudinal comparison between the data provided by the teachers in the two moments of administration of the questionnaire.

The *CLIL Teachers' Competence Grid* investigates teachers' perception of competence in 5 areas, structured in terms of 14 competences and 66 indicators of competence: 1. Methodology; 2. School

policies related to the dissemination of CLIL methodology, 3. Language skills in the second language, 4. Educational design; 5. Strategies to support student learning. For each item the teachers were asked to self-assess their initial competence level using a 7-point Likert scale as follows: 1. I can't do it; 2. I can do it little; 3. I can do something; 4. I can do it; 5. I can do it quite well; 6. I can do it well; I can do it very well (Table 1).

Table 1. The CLIL Teachers' Competence Grid

Areas	Competences	Indicators of competences
1. CLIL Methodology	1. Defining CLIL	1.1 Can explain how CLIL is related to and differs from other language and content learning Approaches 1.2 Can name the various types of CLIL programming options and describe their characteristics 1.3 Can articulate the key elements of the CLIL approach 1.4 Can describe the benefits of CLIL 1.5 Can describe common misconceptions about CLIL
2. School policies	2. Adopting a CLIL approach	2.1 Can describe national policies concerning CLIL 2.2 Can draw on the experience of others 2.3 Can define ways of ensuring program goals are addressed in a balanced manner
	3. Adapting CLIL to the local context	3.1 Can contextualize CLIL teaching with regard to the school curriculum 3.2 Can link program parameters and the needs of a particular class of students 3.3 Can identify and engage with CLIL stakeholders, and help stakeholders (students, parents, inspectors, non- CLIL teachers, etc.) manage expectations with regard to language and content learning targets

3. Language skills in the second language	4 Integrating CLIL into the curriculum	4.1 Can describe how CLIL links to the national curriculum 4.2 Can deliver CLIL according to requirements of educational authorities
	5. Linking the CLIL program with school ethos	5.1 Can articulate how CLIL could be reflected in a school's vision and mission statements, and in planning and public relations documents 5.2 Can foster the integration of the CLIL program into school life (e.g., resource choices, action research, assemblies or other school events) 5.3 Can represent the interests of the CLIL program and of the students when participating in school meetings, and other forms of professional dialogue
	6. Articulating quality assurance measures for CLIL	6.1 Can design and apply evaluation and assessment tools (tests, surveys, portfolio, rubrics, ...) 6.2 Can interpret data from evaluations, and take related measures for program improvement
	7. Using Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)	7.1 Can communicate using contemporary social registers 7.2 Can adjust social and academic registers of communication according to the demands of a given context
	8. Using Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)	8.1 Can read subject material and theoretical texts 8.2 Can use appropriate subjects specific terminology and syntactic structures 8.3 Can conceptualize whilst using the target language
	9. Using the language of classroom management, can use the target language in:	9.1 Group management 9.2 Time management 9.3 Classroom noise management 9.4 Giving instructions 9.5 Managing interaction 9.6 Managing co-operative work 9.7 Enhancing communication
	10. Using the language of teaching	10.1 Can use own oral language production as a tool for teaching, through varying: registers of speech cadence tone and volume

4.Educational design	11. Using the language of learning activities	<p>11.1 Can use target language in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11.1.1 Explain 11.1.2 Present information 11.1.3 Give instructions 11.1.4 Clarify and check understanding 11.1.5 Check level of perception of difficulty <p>11.2 Can use the following forms of talk: exploratory, disputational, critical, presentational</p>
	12. Designing a course	<p>12.1 Can adapt course syllabus so that it includes language, content and learning skills outcomes</p> <p>12.2 Can integrate the language and subject curricula so that subject curricula support language learning and vice versa</p> <p>12.3 Can design balanced formative and summative assessment tools measuring uptake in both language and content</p> <p>12.4 Can plan for the incorporation of other CLIL core features and driving principles into course outlines and into lesson planning, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.4.1 Scaffolding language 12.4.2 Content and learning skills development 12.4.3 Learner autonomy 12.4.4 Fostering critical and creative thinking 12.4.5 Helping students to link learning from various subjects in the curriculum 12.4.6 Using assessment for improving student learning (learning skills, content and language, as well as cognitive development) 12.4.7 Fostering communication with other target language users

		<p>12.5 Can select learning materials, structuring them or otherwise adapting them as needed</p> <p>12.6 Can identify and make use of learning environments in addition to the classroom (e.g., discussion forums, study groups, school grounds, a community center, the neighborhood)</p> <p>12.7 Can select the language needed to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.7.1 Student comprehension 12.7.2 Rich language and content input 12.7.3 Rich student language and content output 12.7.4 Efficient classroom management
5.Strategies to support student learning	13. Working with others to enhance student learning	<p>13.1 Can cooperate with parents to support student learning by: guiding parents in understanding and using the terminology and concepts of education, so they can better support their child's learning, raising awareness about productive and counterproductive strategies used by parents, learning more about the student</p> <p>13.2 Can cooperate with school managers, educational authorities, and other decision makers</p> <p>13.3 Can express own professional concerns and needs to fellow teachers</p> <p>13.4 Can agree on common teacher training goals with fellow teachers</p> <p>13.5 Can analyze learner's needs with fellow teachers</p> <p>13.6 In the case of team- and co-teaching, can develop efficient task-sharing</p>

	14. Building constructive relationship with students	14.1 Can connect with each student personally 14.2 Believes in each student's capacity to learn and avoids labelling students 14.3 Is respectful of diversity 14.4 Can create a reassuring and enriching learning environment 14.5 Can support individual and differentiated learning 14.6 Can engage SEN (=BES in Italian) students 14.7 Can adapt materials and strategies to students' needs
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4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The collected data were entered into a matrix that allowed deriving both the sum of all scores made by teachers for each indicator, so as to detect areas with a lower/higher degree of perception of competence, and the final score of each teacher so as to detect the courses effectiveness. A mono-variate analysis of the data was then carried out. For the 5 areas, the frequency of each score on the Likert scale was detected; the scores were then grouped into 3 bands (0-3 points = A; 4-5 points = B; 6-7 points = C) with the corresponding percentage, as shown in the example for Area 1:

Table 2. Likert points grouping in Area 1

Area 1 – CLIL Methodology				
Likert points	<i>f</i>	Bands	Σ	%
0	10	A	595	87,5%
1	252			
2	201			
3	132			
4	52	B	66	9,7%
5	14			
6	17	C	19	2,8%
7	2			
Total	680			

Band C indicates a perception of safe/very safe competence to mean that the teacher can act well in the given context; band B indicates a perception of basic competence, while band A refers to a minimum level that research considers as the initial level. The same analysis was carried out for the other areas, resulting in the following Table 3:

Table 3. Percentage of each group of Likert points for each area

Area	Band A (0-3)	Band B (4-5)	Band C (6-7)
1-CLIL Methodology	87,50%	9,70%	2,80%
2-School policies	85,92%	11,52%	2,56%
3-Language skills in the second language	56,80%	35,71%	7,49%
4-Educational design	73,03%	21,49%	5,48%
5-Strategies to support student learning	42,99%	35,69%	21,32%
Average of the percentage	69,24%	22,82%	7,93%
Rounded percentages	69%	23%	8%

Most of the choices were for the lower values: about 70% of the sample stated that they did not know how to do or did little in each area of the questionnaire. The teachers' perception of their CLIL competences reveals a critical point in methodology (87,50%) and in school policy implying adapting CLIL into the context and integrating it into the curriculum (85,92%). The only area in which there were more choices for bands B and C is the area dedicated to supporting student learning (area 5). It means the teachers perceive they are more competent in supporting students. The sample also reported language proficiency (almost 36%) related to appropriate language registers, being able to read theoretical texts, with specific terminology. More than half of the teachers claimed to be familiar with academic language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or CALP), but only 40% claimed to be able to adapt linguistic register to context and to be able to use content-related social registers (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills or BICS).

The analysis of the scores of each indicator made it possible to identify the lowest and highest perception of competence in each area (Table 4).

Table 4. Items with the lowest/highest score for each area.

	item	Descriptor		Σ	%
Area 1	1.2	Can describe the characteristic of CLIL methodology	-	129	21,68
	1.4	Can describe the benefits of CLIL	+	251	42,18
Area 2	4.2	Can organize CLIL according to requirements of educational authorities	-	163	27,39
	3.1	Can contextualize CLIL teaching about the school curriculum	+	210	37,47
Area 3	7.2	Can adjust social and academic registers - of communication according to the demands of a given context	-	223	40,84
	8.1	Can read subject material and + theoretical texts	+	58,99	58,99
Area 4	12.4	Can plan language scaffolding	-	181	30,42
	12.5	Can select learning materials, structuring, or adapting them as needed	+	266	44,70
Area 5	13.1	Can cooperate with families to support student learning	-	235	39,49
	14.3	Is respectful of diversity	+	373	62,68

Teachers report being able to describe the benefits of the CLIL methodology for the curriculum and selecting materials and activities, understanding the specific language, and operating with respect for pupil diversity. They do not yet perceive themselves to be able to fully design and implement CLIL lessons using context-appropriate language registers and language scaffolding, but the greatest difficulty is reported in connecting with families for the purpose of students' educational success.

The analysis of the statistical indices of mode, mean and median showed that the most critical issue regarded the methodological area with the most frequent score is 1 (= I do not know), while a greater

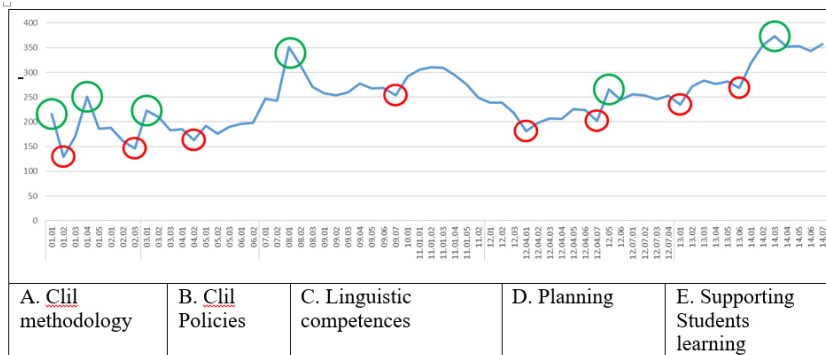
perception of competence is found in the area of student support (score 4 = I can do) (Table 5).

Table 5. Mode, mean and median in each area

	Mo	Ma	Me
Area 1	1	2,5	2
Area 2	2	2,5	2
Area 3	3	3,28	3
Area 4	3	2,69	3
Area 5	4	5	4

The following graph was derived from the sum of the scores for each item, and it summarizes the situation of the group of teachers in training. The highlighted horizontal line indicates the threshold level of scores equal to 231. This value is obtained by multiplying the 66 indicators by the threshold level 3.5. Any indicator above this line suggests a positive perception of the competence expressed. In contrast, indicators whose sum is below the line show areas of competence yet to be developed.

Graphic 1. Distribution of scores of each indicator



5. CONCLUSION

This paper was intended to investigate self-assessment competences in non-linguistic subjects teaching using the CLIL methodology. It

focused on the first step of the overall research, the pre-test phase. Despite the small sample, the research carried out on Tuscan secondary school teachers who attended the CLIL methodological courses at the University of Florence highlighted their perception of lower competence in some areas, for which it is thus necessary to structure an effective training regarding the theoretical and didactic-practical dimensions of the CLIL approach for the school curriculum (item 1.3; 2.3; 4.2). In particular, it emerges that teachers need to: acquire skills for CLIL lessons by linking content and use of the foreign language in specific teaching activities (item 12.1); identify effective types of actions to link mother tongue and second language through scaffolding (item 12.4.1); foster the use of the foreign language to encourage communication in small groups (item 12.4.7); design assessment tools through authentic tests both in terms of language and content (item 3.2); cooperate with parents and families to support students. There are many areas for further exploration in the field and it is necessary to maintain future contribution to CLIL research.

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