



Learning a Language and Studying Content in an Additional Language: Student Opinions

Ugur Ger *

International Burch University, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Mustafa Bahar

International Burch University, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Received: November 27, 2017 • Revised: February 8, 2018 • Accepted: February 11, 2018

Abstract: This study aims to understand the opinions of middle school and high school students about language learning and studying other content in an additional language in the school settings where English is used as the medium of instruction to teach more than 50% of the curriculum. For this end, 261 students from three different schools were administered a questionnaire. Results indicate students generally have very positive opinions about learning languages and studying content in their non-native language. There is no statistically significant difference between the students' opinion and their school level, and the years that they have been learning a language and studying content in an additional language. However, the students who have a negative opinion about the school have negative opinions about learning languages and studying content in an additional language. The possible reasons for these were evaluated from the perspective of language learning context but further study would be needed to establish causality.

Keywords: *Additional language, CLIL, learning content, language learning.*

To cite this article: Ger, U., & Bahar, M. (2018). Learning a language and studying content in an additional language: Student opinions. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 4(1), 29-35. doi: 10.12973/ijem.4.1.29

Introduction

Since the globalization increased the linguistic demands of today's people, the need for learning and teaching languages has become more significant than it has ever been. The schools and other education authorities are looking for the ways of increasing the quality of their language teaching programs. Having only one foreign language program is not seen enough for most schools in today's world. Since the beginning of the 1990s, foreign language teaching techniques have been updated and improved because of the socio-economic and global reasons and this mainly resulted in using an additional language to teach content in an additional language to increase the quality of foreign language teaching (Novotná & Hofmannová, 2000). This was the main reason for many educational institutions from pre-school to university level to start offering programs in an additional language. In today's Europe, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is the most popular one among these models.

Learning Content in an Additional Language: Bilingual Education and CLIL

The people who speak two or more languages significantly outnumber the people who speak only one language. Therefore, developing bilingual education programs has been inevitable in different regions of the world. Political, social, economic and cultural factors are the other reasons for creating and developing various kinds of bilingual education programs with different aims.

Baker (2001) devises a typology of bilingual education programs in two main categories: Weak forms of bilingual education programs and strong forms of bilingual education programs. Focusing on their aim in a language, they can also be grouped as additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism sees the two languages as opponents and aims the second language replace the first language, which creates monolinguals rather than bilinguals. On the contrary, additive bilingualism reinforces child's first language and enables them to learn an additional language, which creates bilinguals, thus the term additive is used. In this categorization, immersion is an additive type of bilingualism that falls into strong category of bilingual education programs. These concepts are sometimes misunderstood, and there have been many controversies whether these bilingual programs have positive or

*** Corresponding author:**

Ugur Ger, PhD candidate, International Burch University, Faculty of Education and Humanities, BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
Email: ugurger@gmail.com

negative effects on the learners. However, additive bilingual education programs are usually favored. Mehisto (2012) states:

Bilingual education supports individuals in becoming and remaining bilingual (additive bilingualism). At least two languages are used to teach different content subjects such as Mathematics or History throughout the final if not all the years of school life.

The students in this study are exactly falling in the category that Mehisto (2012) is describing above. So, these students are studying in a bilingual program which aims to reinforce the first language and to teach an additional language. This is very similar to CLIL methodology.

What is CLIL?

CLIL takes its roots from the immersion method. However, CLIL has its own characteristics that clearly cut it from immersion method. In spite of the similarities, several issues need to be addressed that will help to highlight the differences between CLIL and immersion programmes (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009). The language of instruction is stated as the main difference by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009):

The language used in CLIL is not a language spoken locally: unlike immersion programmes, which are carried out in languages present in the students' context (be it home, society at large, or both home and society), the languages of instruction for CLIL programmes are foreign languages and many of the students only have contact with them in formal instruction contexts.

Teachers in immersion programs are mostly the native speakers of the medium of instruction whereas CLIL teachers are non-native speakers. The age to start the program, learning objectives and teaching materials are highlighted as other significant differences between CLIL and immersion programs by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009).

The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was first used in 1994 in conjunction with the European Commission with both political and educational aims. In the last ten years, European Union has largely expanded with the new member states. This has resulted in the mobility of people and interaction among cultures within the Union. "CLIL is an umbrella term for immersion, bilingual education and enriched language programs. What is new about CLIL is that it synthesizes and provides a flexible way of applying the knowledge learned from these various approaches." (P Mehisto, Marsh, & Frigols, 2008). CLIL aims to teach both content and language at the same time while reinforcing intercultural understanding. Using CLIL, students learn one or more of their school subjects in a targeted language, often English, but sometimes in another second language. Students aren't expected to be proficient in the new language before they begin studying (Attard Montalto, Walter, Theodorou, & Chrysanthou, 2016).

Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008) define CLIL as a teaching method which uses the non-native language of the students for teaching at primary, secondary and/or also vocational –level subjects such as math, science, art or business. CLIL is not a method designed to teach a specific language and subject to a specific target group. It can be used teaching geography in Italian to German students or teaching Math in Portuguese to Turkish students. According to Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008), CLIL is a tool for the teaching and learning of content and language and they have argued that it has a dual focus: Language learning is included in content classes. Content from subjects is used in language-learning classes. The language teacher, working together with teachers of other subjects, incorporates the vocabulary, terminology and texts from those other subjects into his or her classes.

There have been studies that show CLIL had positive effect on students' learning (Heras & Lasagabaster, 2015; Whittaker, Llinares and McCabe, 2011) but more is needed to establish a strong positive association of achievement and CLIL.

Methodology

In order to understand students' views and perceptions about learning languages and learning content in an additional language, survey method was utilized to collect data. The participants were invited to complete a questionnaire developed by Cross and Gearson (2013). (Appendix I)

Research questions

In consonance with the items in the questionnaire by Cross and Gearon, (2013) the research questions are listed as follows:

What are the students' general opinion about learning languages?

Is there a difference between students' opinions about language learning and learning content in an additional language with respect to their opinions about school?

What are the students' opinions about studying content in an additional language?

How do these opinions relate to each other by students'; grade levels, the time that they have studied languages?

Participants

Three private schools in Bosnia Herzegovina using English as the medium of instruction to teach more than 70% of their local curricula were chosen to conduct this study. Students in grades 8-12 from these three schools were invited to participate in the study. The total number of participants $n=261$ and their distribution by grades are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants by their Grades

Grades	N	%
Grade 8	11	4.2
Grade 9	39	14.9
Grade 10	94	36.0
Grade 11	47	18.0
Grade 12	70	26.8
Total	261	100.0

Data Collection

The Internet has introduced innovations that have spawned new methods for conducting surveys, most notably surveys done via electronic mail (e-mail) and the World Wide Web (Schonlau, Fricker, & Elliott, 2002). Internet-based surveys are becoming more common in many areas of social studies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The web-based questionnaire was created by using OPINA online open-source survey software. The school administrators were contacted prior to the study and they were informed in detail. After granting permission from the school administrators, the surveys were conducted with the help of Information and Technology (IT) teachers. The students who were expected to participate in the study have weekly information and technology IT lessons. After creating the survey online, it was shared by e-mail with the IT teachers of the students. A very detailed e-mail was sent to IT teachers about how the survey should be conducted and the IT teachers were requested to ask the students to complete the survey on a voluntary basis when the students have IT lessons. So, the researcher was not with the participants when they were completing the questionnaire.

"...having the researcher present may be threatening and exert a sense of compulsion, where respondents may feel uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire, and may not want to complete it or even start it." (Cohen et al., 2007)

The quantitative data collected from the participants were analyzed by using IBM SPSS statistics software. The responses were measured against a Likert scale from (1) not very much to (4) very much. So, we made use of non-parametric tests.

Results

All items except for the ones listed below in Table 2 have the median value of 3.

Table 2. Items with Distinct Results

Items	N	Median
1 Is learning another language important?	261	4.00
2 Would you like to travel to the country of the language you are learning some	261	4.00
3 How important is it for all students to learn another language?	261	4.00
4 Is schoolwork difficult in English?	261	2.00
5 Do you like school?	261	2.00

According to the results of item 1, 2 and 3 in Table 2, all students have the opinion that learning another language is important not only for themselves but also for their peers. Additionally, they all want to travel to the country of the language they are studying someday. On the other hand, item 4 "Is school work difficult in English?" and item 5 "Do you like your school?" have the lowest median values among all items. We analyzed results by taking the item (do you like your school?) as an independent variable and wanted to understand whether there is a difference between students' opinion about language learning and learning content in an additional language with respect to their opinions about school.

Table 3. The Difference in Opinions with regard to Whether Students Like Going to School

Do you like school?		N	Mean Rank	X ²	df	p.	Source of Difference
How much do you enjoy studying languages?	1	56	98.31	23.251	3	.001	
	2	80	127.41				
	3	67	136.27				
	4	58	161.42				
	Total	261					
Does learning another language help you think about your first language any better?	1	56	110.01	7.994	3	.046	1 - 4
	2	80	129.19				
	3	67	137.00				
	4	58	146.84				
	Total	261					
Does learning a language help you to get along with other people any better?	1	56	122.19	10.444	3	.015	2 - 4
	2	80	117.73				
	3	67	132.99				
	4	58	155.52				
	Total	261					
Does learning a language help you to do better in school?	1	56	99.94	22.082	3	.001	1 - 2 1 - 4 3 - 4
	2	80	137.49				
	3	67	123.81				
	4	58	160.34				
	Total	261					
Do you feel confident learning a content area, such as Math, through another language?	1	56	104.37	15.776	3	.001	1 - 4
	2	80	134.91				
	3	67	125.99				
	4	58	157.12				
	Total	261					
Do you think teaching language and content at the same time is an effective way to learn content?	1	56	106.66	13.422	3	.004	1 - 4
	2	80	130.78				
	3	67	130.02				
	4	58	155.93				
	Total	261					

We analyzed students' perception of items with respect to whether they like going to school or not. There was statistically significant difference ($H=23.251$, $p<.001$) between those who liked school and those who did not like school with respect to who enjoyed studying languages. Pairwise comparisons showed that those who strongly disagreed with 'I like school' had lower medians of 'I enjoy studying languages' than those who agreed, and strongly agreed with 'I like school.'

Similarly, Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant difference of mean ranks ($H = 7.994$, $p < 0.046$) between those who liked school and those who did not like school with respect to whether they think learning another language helps them think about their first language any better. We then conducted post hoc tests to test pairwise comparisons. We found that students who strongly agreed with 'I like school' were significantly more in favor of thinking learning another language helps them think in their first language than the students who strongly disagreed with 'I like school' ($p = 0.040$).

As for the item “Does learning a language help you to get along with other people any better?” Kruskal-Wallis test showed significant difference among mean ranks ($H = 10.444$, $p < 0.015$) between those who liked school and those who did not like school with respect to whether they think learning a language helps them get along with other people any better. Post hoc tests showed that students who strongly agreed with ‘I like school’ had significantly higher medians than the students who disagreed with ‘I like school’ ($p = 0.013$).

Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a significant difference among mean ranks ($H = 22.082$, $p < 0.000$) between those who liked the school and those who did not like the school with respect to whether they think learning a language helps them to do better in school. We then conducted post hoc tests to see pairwise comparisons. We found that students who strongly agreed with ‘I like school’ were significantly different from the students who strongly disagreed with ‘I like school’ ($p = 0.001$) with regard to finding learning a language helpful. The difference among those who strongly disagreed, those disagreed, agreed and strongly agreed was significant when it comes to finding learning a language helpful.

As for the item “Do you feel learning a content area, such as Math, through another language,” Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a significant difference among mean ranks ($H = 15.776$, $p < 0.001$) between those who liked school and those who did not like school with respect to whether they feel confident learning a content area, such as Math, through another language. We then conducted post hoc tests to test pairwise comparisons. We found that students who strongly agreed with ‘I like school’ significantly felt more confident learning a content area than the students who strongly disagreed with ‘I like school’ ($p = 0.001$).

Kruskal-Wallis test results for the item “Do you think teaching language and content at the same time is an effective way to learn content,” show a significant difference among mean ranks ($H = 13.422$, $p < 0.004$) between those who liked school and those who did not like school with respect to whether they think teaching a language and content at the same time is an effective way to learn content. Post hoc tests showed that students who strongly agreed with ‘I like school’ were significantly different from the students who strongly disagreed with ‘I like school’ ($p = 0.002$).

The participants are students of three private schools in different cities and the number of years that they have been learning languages and studying content in an additional language varies. These data are shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Students and Their Schools

	Frequency	Percent
International School	37	14.2
High School 1	182	69.7
High School 2	42	16.1
Total	261	100.0

We wanted to see if there was difference between school types. Students responses were analyzed with respect to their schools using Kruskal Wallis test. Results show there is no statistically significant difference between the median of the students from different schools and their opinion about learning languages and studying content in an additional language.

Table 5. Total Number of Years Studying Languages and Content in an Additional Language

	Year of study	N	Mean Rank
How many years in total have you been studying in your current school?	1 year	61	31.00
	2 years	48	85.50
	3 years	53	136.00
	4 years	55	190.00
	5+ years	44	239.50
	Total	261	

Students’ responses were analyzed by the years that they have been learning languages and studying content in an additional language by using Kruskal Wallis test. There is no statistically significant difference between the Median of the years that they have been learning languages and studying content in an additional language and their opinion about learning languages and studying content an additional language.

Discussion

Except for the ones shown in Table 2, each item in the questionnaire that was conducted to understand the opinions of students about language learning and learning content in an additional language had the median of 3. This shows us that students generally have positive opinions about learning language and learning content in an additional language, which is not the native language of the students. Our results are similar with the findings of Heras and Lasagabaster (2015). Table 2 shows the items with distinct results. In this table, the items with the median value of 4 show that students think that learning another language is important and they are very positive about travelling to the country of the language they are studying. This can be a strong indicator that all students have the tendency to improve their language skills by experiencing it in its natural environment and even to be more involved in the culture of the language that they are learning. On the other hand, having a median value of 2 for item 4 in table 2 is a positive thing which shows us that students do not really find it difficult to learn content in English. However, item 5 "Do you like your school?" may need some interpretation. Studies conducted in various fields showed that there is a strong correlation between motivation and language learning achievement (Lasagabaster, 2011). Although there may be various reasons for this low median value, we will interpret it in our context: Learning another language and learning content in an additional language. Students who do not like school do not have positive opinions about language learning either and vice versa. This may show that the students' perception of 'liking' the school is strongly related to their opinion about language learning. Those students who do not like their school think that learning another language does not help them think in their first languages any better. Additionally, the same group of students, the ones who have a low median value of liking the school, do not feel confident when learning content in an additional language. The feeling of not being confident may be one of the reasons why they have a low level of liking the school. Their lack of competence in the target language may be negatively influencing their attitude towards the school. Research shows that students' attitudes and achievements are related. Those students also think that teaching a language and content at the same time is not an effective way to learn content. So, we can conclude that the students who have negative opinions about liking the school have negative opinions about language learning and learning content in an additional language and vice versa. The type of the school that the students are currently attending and the number of years that they have been studying another language have no effect on their opinion about language learning and studying content in an additional language, considering lack of significant difference. As teaching content in another language may be more challenging for some students, they should be helped out to increase their positive attitudes towards school. Because, apparently, it may adversely affect general student achievement as well.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study was conducted in three private schools in different cities where English is used to teach for some part of the curriculum. A study in a broader sense in which more schools, both public and private, are involved can give a better idea about the opinions of the students about language learning and studying content in an additional language. By the way, to dig deeper and understand more about the relationship between 'do you like school' and students' opinion about language learning and studying content in an additional language an in depth qualitative study, which involves the interview with the students, is recommended for future research. Besides, there is a need to establish causality between attitude towards school and learning content in additional language.

References

- Attard Montalto S., Walter, L., Theodorou, M., & Chrysanthou, K. (2016). The CLIL guidebook, 49. Retrieved from <https://www.languages.dk/archive/clil4u/book/CLIL Book En.pdf>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education, Sixth Edition*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Cross, R., & Gearon, M. (2013). Research and evaluation of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teaching and learning languages in Victorian schools, 1–125.
- Heras, A. & Lasagabaster, D. (2015). The impact of CLIL on affective factors and vocabulary learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(1), 70–88
- Lasagabaster, D. (2011). English achievement and student motivation in CLIL and EFL settings. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2010.519030>
- Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (2009). Immersion and CLIL in English: More differences than similarities. *ELT Journal*, 64(4), 367–375. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccp082>
- Mehisto, P. (2012). *Excellence in Bilingual Education A Guide for School Principals*. Retrieved from https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=+Excellence+in+bilingual+education%3A+A+guide+for+school+principals&btnG=
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D., & Frigols, M. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL. Content and Language Integrated Learning in Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Macmillan Education. Oxford.

- Novotná, J., & Hofmannová, M. (2000). CLIL and mathematics education. *Proceedings of the International Conference on "Mathematics for Living: The Mathematics Education Into the 21st Century Project,"* (Clil), 226–230.
- Schonlau, M., Fricker, R. D., & Elliott, M. N. (2002). *Conducting research surveys via e-mail and the web. Monograph Report MR1480* (Vol. 9). Pittsburgh: RAND. <https://doi.org/MR-1480-RC>
- Whittaker, R., Llinares, A. & McCabe, A. (2011). Written discourse development in CLIL at secondary school. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(3), 343–362.