

# Implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning at Schools in Latvia

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**Abstract** The European Union supports multilingualism and promotes the learning of foreign languages since their knowledge enhances understanding among peoples and increases employability. To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of foreign language education in schools, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been promoted in Europe; this has influenced ways in which Latvia nowadays approaches bilingual education. A qualitative case study was undertaken to explore the implementation of CLIL at schools in Latvia, CLIL being seen as an element of bilingual education. This article outlines the development of CLIL in Latvia, which is largely embedded in national level policies which have a substantial effect on the development of bilingual education and CLIL. It also clarifies the aims of this educational approach in the context of the present education challenges and assesses its potential in Latvia. It can be observed that education policies in Latvia not only aim at strengthening the ethnic minority learners' knowledge of Latvian, but also at changing from the focus on second and foreign language learning outcomes to the emphasis on an integrated view on the development of language and non-linguistic subject content.

**Keywords:** multilingualism; CLIL; Bilingual education; Case study; Latvia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Latvia, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (henceforth CLIL) has been known since the late 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [1]. For a long time, it was mostly associated with bilingual education, which was implemented in ethnic minority schools in the context of *heterogeneous* national environment when organizing simultaneously the educational process in the learners' mother tongue and the state official language - Latvian, gradually increasing

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the proportion of the latter [2]. However, bilingual education was not restricted to ethnic minority school curricula, as the schools in Latvia were allowed to include bilingual subjects in their curriculum, that is, one or several subjects were taught in a language other than the language of instruction, for example, English. This type of schooling was seen as an effective means of developing proficiency in languages.

Today, bilingual education in Latvia is understood as learning in a language other than a mother tongue, integrating the acquisition of the non-linguistic academic content and a language. As of 2010, CLIL methodology is referred not only to ethnic minority education, where the Latvian language is used as a second language to learn academic content, but also to schools with Latvian as a language of instruction [1]. Currently, bilingual education still remains a more widely used and understood term than the acronym CLIL.

This article uses CLIL and bilingual education interchangeably, and it has chosen the definition given in a document published by the Eurydice European Unit as its working definition: ‘CLIL is used as a generic term to describe all types of provision in which a second language (a foreign, regional or minority language and/or another official state language) is used to teach certain subjects in the curriculum other than language lessons themselves’ [3].

Using the case study, the present enquiry has undertaken to explore the implementation of CLIL at schools in Latvia by systematically collecting and analysing relevant literature and documents. It aims at (1) placing CLIL in a historical context to elucidate the state-of-the-art development of CLIL in Latvia, (2) clarifying the aims of CLIL in Latvia in the context of the present education challenges, (3) assessing the potential of CLIL in Latvia.

## 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to explore the nature of bilingual education and understand the role of CLIL in Latvia, a brief insight into its historical context is necessary. Druviete [22, 4] remarks that the development of bilingual education in Latvia is largely based on the theoretical contribution of Colin Baker, who emphasizes the relevance of a country’s historical context to bilingual education: ‘[...] there is a danger in isolating current bilingualism and bilingual education from their historical roots’ [182, 5]. Similarly, Paulston highlights that ‘unless we try in some way to account for the socio-historical, cultural, and economic-political factors which lead to certain forms of bilingual education, we will never understand the consequences of that education’ [183, 5].

Druviete [22, 4] argues that bilingual education is linked to the concept of power: ‘*cuius regio, eius lingua*’, meaning that the language of the ruler

is to dictate the language of those ruled. The independence of the Republic of Latvia was re-established in 1991, after Latvia being incorporated into the Soviet Union for about 50 years. In the Soviet times, Latvia was a bilingual country with Russian as the main language in the public sphere. There were schools with Latvian and Russian as a language of instruction. After regaining independence, the state policies strengthening the Latvian language aimed at introducing Latvian into the schools with Russian as a language of instruction, gradually making them bilingual.

The present-day policy documents regulate the use of the Latvian language and ethnic minority languages in Latvia. The Constitution of Latvia [6] (adopted in 1922 and re-established in 1991) stipulates that the Latvian language is the official state language. Such languages as Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Polish and others are foreign languages in Latvia. The main purpose of the Law on State Language adopted in 1999 is to ‘ensure the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language’ [7].

The Law on State Language also acknowledges the rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities and provides that they can preserve and develop their mother tongue and their ethnic and cultural identity. The Law ensures ‘the integration of national minorities into Latvian society while respecting their right to use their mother tongue or any other language’ [7]. It states that the Russian-speaking population’s Latvian language skills are to be developed so that a faster integration of society is fostered [7].

The Law on Education [8] stipulates that general education in Latvia is to be obtained in Latvian and that alongside Latvian other languages may be used in national minority education curricula, which are offered in seven languages: Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Estonian, and Lithuanian. The state financed 109 schools in one of the aforementioned languages and 65 schools that had both Latvian and minority language programmes in the academic year 2014/2015 [9].

Bilingual education in ethnic minority primary schools was introduced in 1999 and in secondary schools - in 2004. As of 2007, secondary schools are entitled to teach 60% of all subjects (of their choice) in the Latvian language [10].

Ethnic majority schools have the right to offer specialized programmes, where some subjects are taught in a foreign language. Traditionally, these are schools specializing in English, German or French.

There are two state schools which offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in English - Riga State Gymnasium No. 2 and Riga State Gymnasium No.1, whose academic achievements on school leaving

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examinations and at various domestic and international academic competitions are consistently the highest in the country [11].

Generally, the results of bilingual education in ethnic minority schools are not questioned anymore, and Druviete [34, 4] contends that it is high time CLIL were introduced when teaching a foreign language in all educational institutions. Mickeviča and Ustinova [139, 12] consider that learners' motivation to learn in CLIL classes is sometimes stronger than in mandatory ones, as they are aware of the value of the acquired competences in their future studies and work.

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### 3. CLIL IN LATVIA IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN UNION EDUCATION POLICIES: STATUS QUO

The knowledge of foreign languages is *an asset for the European Union* (henceforth EU), and the European Commission (henceforth Commission) encourages the member states to promote multilingualism and the learning of foreign languages, as their knowledge helps to develop understanding between peoples and contributes to competitiveness, mobility and employability. The 2008 Communication 'Multilingualism – an asset for Europe and a shared commitment' emphasizes the value of linguistic and cultural diversity in the EU and stresses that one of the European Commission's priorities includes helping EU countries 'develop new educational tools to ensure that school-leavers have better language skills' [13].

The Commission encourages the member states to improve the quality of language learning and teaching and to explore the potential of innovative approaches to the development of language competences. CLIL has been mentioned in several EU policy documents. For instance, the **Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism** outlines the steps to improve language teaching and encourages the member states to:

devote particular attention to the further training of language teachers and to enhancing the language competences of teachers in general, in order to promote the teaching of non-linguistic subjects in foreign languages (CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning). [14]

CLIL is regarded as an important instrument to foster European citizens' multilingualism, as it enhances meaningful language use and situated language learning.

The first CLIL methodology materials for subject teachers were published by the Latvian Language Agency in 2003-2004 [42, 1]. A European-funded project in 2006 marked a purposeful introduction of content and Latvian

language integrated learning in the ethnic minority schools in Latvia [42-47, 1]. The project developed a methodology support system, which comprised professional development programmes for secondary school teachers of biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, sport, history, politics, law, introduction to economics, geography; individual support for the Latvian language and subject teachers (e.g. lesson planning, syllabus design); collaboration model development between Latvian language and subject teachers as well as between one subject teachers in different schools; development of teaching/learning materials. The project resulted in 14 methodology materials on content and language integrated learning in physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, geography, economics, and history. A collection of articles in the book 'Content and Language Integrated Learning – Bilingual Education: the Experience of Latvia and the World. For Bilingual Teachers. Examples of Good Practice' (2008) marked the beginning of book series on bilingual education [ibid.].

The project 'Professional Competence Development of Latvian Language and Literature and Bilingual Educators' (2010) reflects a broader understanding of the term CLIL - it is referred not only to ethnic minority schools, but also to ethnic majority schools, where CLIL can be used to learn a foreign language [54, 1]. One of the project goals was the training of expert teachers or *multipliers*. The project aimed at developing an online environment for teacher development and CLIL e-learning courses in English and other European Union languages and assisting in the development of teaching/learning materials.

If requirements and standards set for bilingual education exist at the state level, then there has been much freedom for the implementation of CLIL, as CLIL subjects are elective. Some schools have included CLIL in their school curriculum. For example, Geography in English as an elective subject in Form 7 is taught at Daugavpils Russian Lyceum. CLIL math classes in Valmiera Secondary School No 2 are offered by an English language teacher in cooperation with a teacher of mathematics; an arts teacher from Riga English Gymnasium, a teacher of physics and science at Riga Lastadija Primary Boarding-School, a teacher of science and geography at Riga Secondary school No 34, an English language and history teacher at Balozu Secondary School and many others employ CLIL methodology [122-123, 15].

In Daugavpils, which is the second-largest town in Latvia in terms of population, CLIL has been used since 2006. In 2004 and 2005, 27 CLIL teachers were trained. At present, 11 schools out of 17 are implementing CLIL, and 42 teachers and 500 learners of forms 1-12 are involved. CLIL is used in the acquisition of 14 subjects (e.g. mathematics, physics, social sciences, biology, sport, health studies), and English is used as a foreign language in all

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the schools. CLIL classes range from two to 10 classes a week. The approach is used in elective subjects financed by the local municipality [12].

Since September 2004, all teachers in Latvia including those involved in CLIL instruction have to hold a degree, a relevant qualification and an in-service training background (i.e. in-service training courses of 36 hours in a 3-year period) [16].

In 1998, a regulation was passed providing that the teachers whose mother tongue is not Latvian have to know the official state language at C level according to the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [16].

Teachers involved in CLIL type education using Latvian and a foreign language as languages of instruction do not have to be native speakers, and they are usually qualified to teach languages and non-linguistic subjects. In primary education, teachers specialising in foreign languages and those who have completed the relevant in-service courses are qualified to teach another subject in their specialist language. In lower and upper secondary education, a subject teacher may use another language in the teaching process [16].

Another way to use a foreign language in the education process is close cooperation between the subject teacher and the foreign language teacher. According to Mickeviča and Ustinova [12], four types of teacher cooperation models are used in Daugavpils: (1) cooperation between the subject teacher and the English language teacher in the form of a) joint lesson planning or material development, b) English language teacher's consultations on language use, c) team teaching. (2) teacher cooperation in the form of a) joint lesson planning or material development, b) subject teachers' consultations with the English language teacher on language use, c) team teaching, d) preparing learners in English language classes for the comprehension of the subject. (3) a lesson is run by the subject teacher in English, organizing the acquisition of the subject matter and the language. The relationship between the English language teacher and the subject teacher is consultative in nature. (4) the English language teacher uses some material connected with the subject matter and provides cross-cultural knowledge. The emphasis is put on the language teaching rather than content. The English language teacher cooperates with different subject teachers to learn about topicalities in their subjects [144-147, 12]. Model 1 and Model 3 are the most widely used ones in Daugavpils since they are the most effective ones in terms of funding and study results [147, 12].

In general, Latvia recognizes the manifold benefits of CLIL instruction. Enriching the content of language learning makes it more challenging and motivating for language learning. It can contribute to improving learners'

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language skills and subject knowledge, developing diverse learning strategies and learners' cognitive abilities, as well as promoting multiculturalism and intercultural understanding.

CLIL helps to achieve the present-day education goals and objectives; it blends smoothly into the education system, addresses and fulfils topical educational needs [12].

Despite the benefits of CLIL-based instruction, it requires the optimisation of language and non-linguistic subject teaching, balancing the teaching of both aspects so that learning is as deep as it would be if the subject were delivered in the learners' mother tongue. Thus, training of teachers for CLIL teaching methodologies is crucial.

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#### 4. FUTURE POTENTIAL OF CLIL IN LATVIA

There are a number of reasons why CLIL has not been introduced broadly in the school system [71,1]: (1) teachers and learners lack adequate foreign language skills, (2) there are not enough teaching/learning materials, (3) some teachers object to the dominance of English, (4) there is a lack of support from the administration of some schools.

Nevertheless, although CLIL has not become part of mainstream education in Latvia yet, the teachers who have acquired and use it consider that the classes which are **content-driven** with a **dual focus** on teaching both the non-linguistic subject and a language and which promote cross-cultural awareness are necessary to provide for the educational needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This reflects the European Union's vision of a multilingual Europe (see above).

The education policy of Latvia has been quite successful in the implementation of the European policy objective of a trilingual population, as the majority of the population in Latvia (54%) is trilingual [13, 17]. Nevertheless, Latvia is aware of further steps needed so that multilingual citizens can take full advantage of the economic, educational and professional opportunities offered by an integrated Europe.

In 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia approved a medium-term policy planning document 'The Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2014-2020', which defines the all-embracing education policy, the action plan and specific stakeholder activities. It highlights the role and development of multilingualism by the year 2020. Article 7 of the document specifies the development of a multilingual person, by fostering foreign language (EU languages) skills, as well as facilitating the acquisition of the mother tongue and the state language [18].

In order to better prepare teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms, paragraph 5.2 of the document [ibid.] states that teachers' professional development in CLIL methodology will be ensured, by working out teaching/ learning materials, as well as teachers' professional development programmes aimed at the improvement of their English language skills. The document highlights both - the action plan for the development of CLIL and bilingual methodology for years 1 to 12.

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## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Latvia, CLIL is considered to be a form of bilingual education where an additional language is used as the language of instruction in non-linguistic school subjects.

To summarize, the forms of bilingual education in Latvia are (1) ethnic minority school programmes; (2) ethnic majority school programmes (traditionally schools specializing in English, German or French) where some subjects (e.g. geography and social sciences) are taught in foreign languages; (3) International Baccalaureate Diploma Programmes; (4) extra-curricular educational programmes (modules or projects).

The role of foreign languages has acquired a broader meaning – apart from being an instrument for communication, they have become a means of acquiring non-linguistic subject content. This view is remarkably different from the understanding of bilingualism from its inception at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latvia.

If initially bilingual education or the CLIL approach was understood and implemented as a way of studying a subject in a second or foreign language, then nowadays Latvia has adopted the view that CLIL teaching combines subject teaching with the developing of language skills, that is, the emphasis is being put on an integrated view on the development of language and non-linguistic subject content.

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