

Attitudinal Trends in CLIL Assessment: a pilot study

Tendencias actitudinales en evaluación AICLE: estudio piloto

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Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de un estudio piloto obtenidos a través de un cuestionario distribuido a futuros maestros de asignaturas de contextos AICLE y no AICLE que están familiarizados con este tipo de metodología por los estudios que están realizando, ya sean de grado o posgrado. El artículo empieza con una introducción al tema y continúa con una revisión de los estudios de investigación relevantes en el campo de la evaluación en este ámbito. A continuación, se presenta el método de nuestro estudio con información sobre el instrumento, los participantes y el contexto académico. Posteriormente, analizamos los resultados con ejemplos concretos de los datos obtenidos. Finalmente, reflexionaremos sobre los resultados obtenidos a modo de conclusión. Los resultados preliminares de este estudio piloto mostrarán los problemas más importantes relacionados con la evaluación en contextos AICLE de acuerdo con las expectativas de futuros maestros sobre cómo podría basarse la enseñanza siguiendo esta metodología.

Palabras clave: Evaluación; Actitudes; AICLE; Estudio Piloto.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present a pilot study based on a questionnaire distributed to prospective teachers of CLIL and non-CLIL courses with familiarity on that type of teaching due to their own studies either through graduate or undergraduate courses. The paper opens with an introduction to the topic and continues with a review of relevant research studies in the field of CLIL assessment. Next, the method of our study is presented with information about the instrument, participants and academic context. After that, the results of the study are analysed and illustrated with examples from the data. Finally, different interpretations of the study will be discussed as a way of conclusion. The preliminary results of this pilot study will show the most significant issues involved in CLIL assessment according to these prospective teachers' expectations of what teaching following this methodology could be like.

Keywords: Assessment; Attitudes; CLIL; Pilot Study.

I ntroduction

A brief research on assessment in Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) evidences a lack of references that specifically address this topic. This has in many cases been due to the overwhelming interest on its success (Coyle, 2006: 2) along with the need to justify its increasing use in many educational systems rather than on its assessment process (Jäppinen, 2005; Pérez Cañado, 2012). Indeed, many studies have already shown the beneficial effects that CLIL has had after its implementation in schools (Massler, Stotz & Queisser, 2014; O'Dwyer & de Boer, 2015; Leal, 2016; Pérez Cañado, 2017; De la Barra, Veloso, & Maluenda, 2018). However, few and very different models of assessment have so far been described (Morgan, 2006; Bertaux *et al.*, 2010) and there are still elements in this respect that remain almost unconsidered such as teachers' attitudes towards testing and assessment (Aiello, Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2017) especially in teacher education (Strotmann, Bamond, Lopez Lago, Bailen, Bonilla *et al.*, 2014; Ennis, 2015). In this sense, as stated by Pérez Cañado (2015: 84), "evaluation is [...] vital in all respects, especially within a novel programme, to provide an insight into how students are reacting to new and unfamiliar circumstances". It is also clear that the students' positive attitudes are one of the cornerstones for educational and CLIL success

(ELDaou & Abdallah, 2019; Kirmizigul & Bektas, 2019; Tajgozari & Alimorad, 2019) especially in pre-service teachers (Genc, 2016). Therefore, the need for assessment measures to adequately evaluate both content and language becomes paramount (Díaz Cobo, 2009). In this respect, Pérez Cañado adds (2015: 84) that in CLIL programmes “it is essential to determine if evaluation in the foreign language is carried out. Only then can we delve deeper to examine if communicative competences and content are being given priority and diversified evaluation models are adhered to.” Assessment can thus be considered a key aspect to continue with the correct implementation of bilingual programmes and the attitudes that teachers working in this environment have towards play a very important role.

The aim of this paper is to present a pilot study based on a questionnaire distributed to prospective teachers of CLIL and non-CLIL courses with familiarity on that type of teaching due to their own studies either through graduate or undergraduate courses. Through the different questions of the questionnaire we wanted to find out what their attitudes toward it were. After this introduction, the paper continues with a review of relevant research studies in the field of CLIL assessment. Next, the method of our study is presented with information about the instrument, participants and academic context. After that, the results of the study are analysed and illustrated with examples from the data. Finally, different interpretations of the study will be discussed as a way of conclusion.

1. Literature review

In 2011 the European Centre for Modern Languages published the European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (Marsh *et al.* 2011). CLIL teachers in Spain are shaped by the requirements upon them before they begin to teach. These requirements are mostly related to their own language competence which may change from one region to another usually being C1 in the CEFR the requirement for English teachers and B2 for content subject teachers (of any other subject). The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education has an extensive

reflection on teacher education providers being these universities or other agencies but the language requirement is usually covered by the demand of a C1. However, there are other aspects that go unrevised such as the knowledge of basics in language and content methodology and many other aspects that can be found in other countries (design of material to use in the classroom, planning, etc.). For instance, Italy requires CLIL teachers “to attend and pass the specific methodological course provided by universities (known in Italy as ‘Corso di perfezionamento’)” (Aiello, Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2017: 72). In this sense, in Spain the situation is beginning to improve and in order to do so Teacher Training Centres and other institutions are working together to ensure that teachers working in bilingual programs are “updated in their language skills, methodological practices, materials development and assessment criteria, and that they are able to implement the European Language Portfolio at all levels”. (Milla Lara & Casas Pedrosa, 2018: 167).

Further research has also approached assessment tools in CLIL contexts for primary education. Massler, Stotz & Queisser (2014) observed the kind of learner’s achievements in the relation of linguistic knowledge and the knowledge of content subjects in Primary Education. The authors also included their own approach of CLIL. However, their observational study just addressed two subjects and certainly not the teachers’ attitudes, which is currently one of the areas where more professional development is required in Spain. Likewise, Brevik & Moe (2012), observed that assessment in CLIL proved that the weakest students benefited best from assessment. However, Leal (2016) expressed that there is still a need to discriminate between content and language. This may be opposed to the views of certain linguists who believe that CLIL may not be different from English for Specific Purposes, which has been used for centuries (García Laborda & Litzler, 2015), in terms of its use in “the teaching methodology, the course design, and the assessment procedure[s]” (Ennis, 2015: 358). Similar results were observed by Aguilar and Rodriguez (2012) who concluded that students in CLIL classes in university tend to focus on language and vocabulary gains but not on content in Spain. A more recent research study published in 2018 by Milla Lara and Casas

Pedrosa showed the outcomes of a qualitative study carried out with teachers in four provinces of eastern Andalusia (Spain) to analyse the development of CLIL programmes in this region. The authors concluded that teachers considered that in their CLIL lessons all contents were assessed and prioritized over linguistic aspects, and evaluation was diverse, formative, summative and holistic. Their results also showed that the oral components, even though they are part of the evaluation, are not highly considered, which is in line with what was stated by Lancaster (2016: 60), who reported that although teachers are generally satisfied with evaluation, “they admit an oral component is not always incorporated into assessment”. This has traditionally been the case of the Spanish educational system and despite an improvement in its situation, written skills are still prioritized over oral skills (Milla Lara & Casas Pedrosa, 2018).

With the exception of this last-mentioned study, most research has failed to simplify and consider that assessment should mostly address language. Unfortunately centering the observation of learning in the language may lead to wrong assumptions about CLIL where the balance between language and content should prevail. This is in line with the definition of CLIL provided by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010, p. 1) as a “dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. That is, there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language”. Indeed, as stated by Kiely (2016), assessment in CLIL is complex due to the dual focus, which means that two assessment processes are involved, and a key issue is to what extent language and content are integrated on the assessment outcomes. As this author argues, this is not easy for the teacher, especially when it is a kind of methodology they have not been completely trained to deal with.

In this sense, regarding teachers’ attitudes towards the assessment of CLIL, a first study was done by Morgan (2006) who just considered the difficulties of the different forms of assessment in CLIL. A second case was presented by O’Dwyer & De Boer (2015) who provided an approach to formative assessment through cooperative skills. Reierstam also conducted a study in 2015 in Sweden in which

she investigated teachers' assessment practices in a CLIL context in three secondary schools. Her findings revealed that CLIL did not seem to have an effect on teachers' assessment practices and that differences seemed to relate to their preferences or their perceptions of the subject they were teaching. In another study conducted by Vilkančienė & Rozgienė (2017) in Lithuania in the context of a CLIL project that aimed to upgrade the competences of subject teachers so as to integrate learning of content and language results revealed that, according to participants "CLIL remains one of the aspects that poses difficulties [...] and causes intense discussions even within the CLIL community itself" (2017: 209). Their study also found that the lack of standards and guidance on assessment is considered to be problematic for teachers and that the development of material and training in this respect should be prioritized.

Despite these studies, not even one has specifically developed teachers' attitudes towards assessment. Therefore, it seemed to be area that needed to be further addressed in research and this was what we attempted to do with our pilot study as it will be shown in the next sections.

2. Method

In order to get insights into a topic that so far has been neglected in research, a survey was designed with seven questions (Appendix 1). This was done after conducting an extensive process of literature review and considering the criteria for the elaboration and application of instruments to collect data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2011).

The participants of our study were both graduate and undergraduate students in language teaching courses at the University of Alcalá and University of Jaén. A total of 35 students responded to the questionnaire. All the questions were closed-response except one about the problems they found in CLIL assessment.

The research questions of this pilot study were:

- 1) What are participants' opinions about assessment?
- 2) What are the main problems and issues they found in assessing CLIL?
- 3) Do they focus on content or language?
- 4) Is writing a CLIL test more or less difficult than writing a language test?

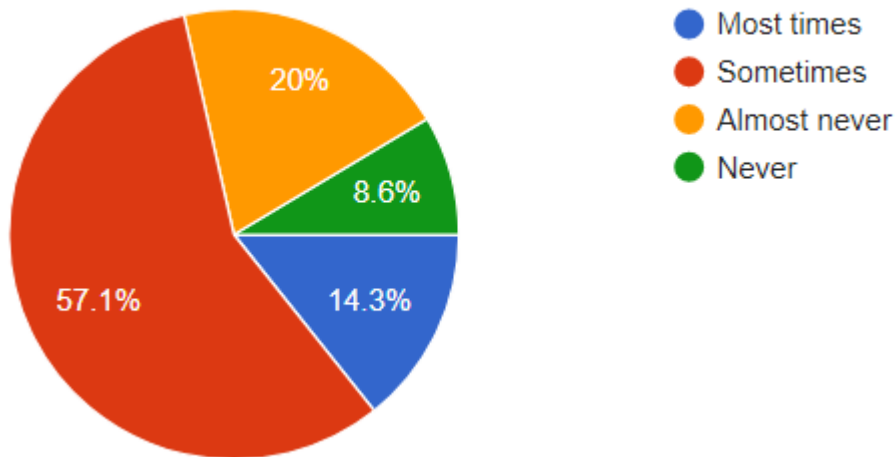
3. Results

The following results show the answers to the above-mentioned questionnaire to analyze the perceptions of participants. The descriptive statistical data from the survey was also triangulated with qualitative information obtained from the open question.

Regarding the first question, 85.7 % of participants stated that they were teaching CLIL courses, whereas 14.3 % said that they were not. As for the second question in which participants were asked if they had ever copied activities (even with minor changes) to write tests for classes other than English as it could be the case of Natural or Social Sciences, the following graph shows the collected answers:

Figure 1

When I write tests for classes other than English (such as Natural or Social Sciences), do "copy" activities (with minor changes) that have already been done in class?



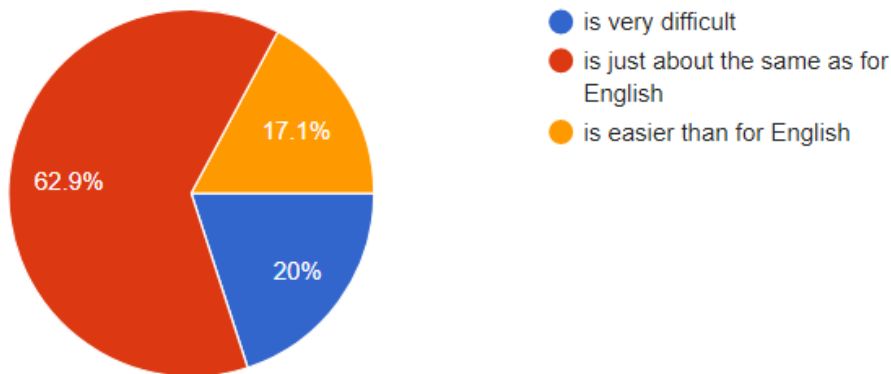
Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Figure 1, only 8.6 % of participants stated that they had never copied activities (with minor changes) when writing tests, whereas the highest percentage of participants (57.1 %) affirmed that they sometimes did and 14.3 % did it most of the time. This shows that most participants did not design their own assessment tools and had to resort to existing material to evaluate their students' learning.

Regarding the difficulty that writing tests for these subjects entails, participants' answers were the following:

Figure 2

I consider that writing a test to assess subjects other than English (such as Natural or Social Sciences).



Source: Own elaboration

However, Figure 2 shows that for more than half of the participants designing a test for a CLIL context is just about the same as for English and only 20% found it very difficult. In this regard, these were the main difficulties that the participants of our pilot study indicated when preparing exams for CLIL students. Answers have been grouped in different thematic categories of analysis:

Table 1

Participant's answers regarding difficulties when preparing exams for CLIL students

Topic	Answers
Students' level of English	8
Finding the right topics	4
Design of an exam according to students' needs	2

Source: Own elaboration

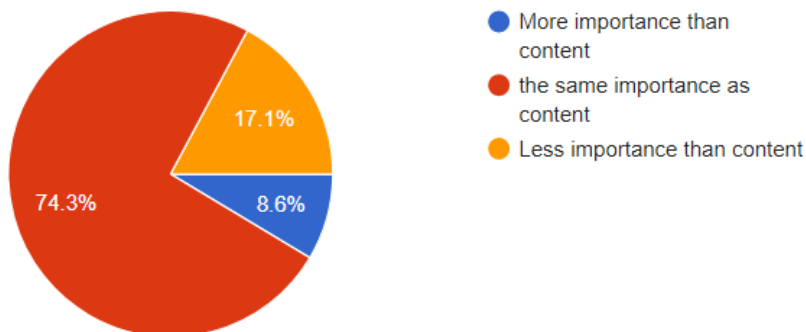
Regarding students' level of English, one participant stated that it is harder to know your students' level of English in a Science class because they are not used to writing complete paragraphs in English and another one stated that he would be worried that students would not understand the questions. Another participant said that CLIL and non-CLIL students could not be assessed following the same level of

difficulty and another one said that the difficulty would be related to being clear enough on the content so that students would not be confused. Another participant's answer added that when developing tests of this kind questions that require to be developed could not be used. Again, this shows that there is a sense of confusion among the criteria and method that needs to be followed to design a test in a CLIL context, which is in line with what Vilkančienė & Rozgienė (2017) stated in their study regarding the difficulties this poses for teachers.

As for the importance of language in CLIL or bilingual Education, these were the answers that participants provided:

Figure 3

Importance of language in CLIL of Bilingual Education



Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Figure 3, the highest percentage (74.3 %) corresponds to participants that considered language as important as content, whereas only 8.6 % considered language to be more important than content. This situation seems to have improved when compared to the results obtained by Aguilar and Rodríguez in their study from 2012, which concluded that students in CLIL classes in Spain focused more on language and vocabulary and not on content. Therefore, our participants' answers seem to be in line with the proper balance of content and language for what is considered to be a successful

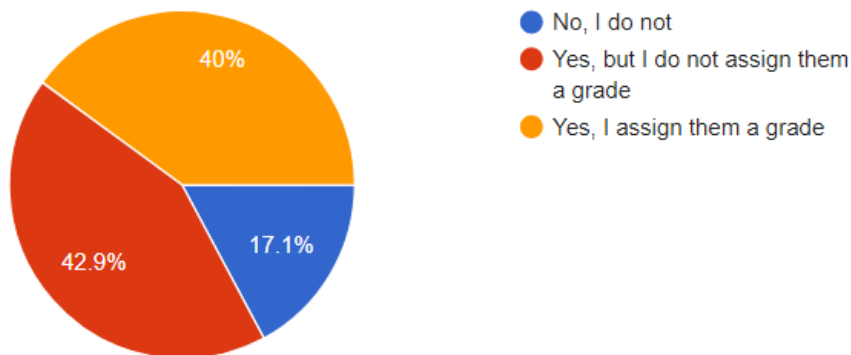
implementation of a CLIL subject according to Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010).

Regarding the use of alternative tools for assessment such as portfolios, presentations or others, 71.4 % of participants stated that they use both tests and other tools of assessments and only 5.7% of participants indicated that they only use tests and the same percentage chose the option of “I do not use tests”.

Finally, when asked if they considered systematically (and numerically) their observations in class, the majority of participants answered affirmatively (82.9 %) (Figure 4). However, only 40 % of them indicated that they assigned these observations a grade.

Figure 4

Do you also consider systematically (and numerically) your observations in class?



Source: Own elaboration

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to present a pilot study based on a questionnaire distributed to prospective teachers of CLIL and non-CLIL courses with familiarity on that type of teaching due to their own studies either through graduate or undergraduate courses. In the section

dedicated to the theoretical framework of our study, we provided a review of the recent literature that focused on assessment in CLIL contexts. As was stated, despite the existence of studies that focus on how teachers currently assess their students and some of the difficulties they encounter, we could confirm that there is no research that specifically develop teachers' attitudes towards assessment in this respect. Therefore, the four research questions that were formulated allowed us to obtain some preliminary results on the topic. First of all, regarding participants' opinions about assessment, we can conclude for more than half of the participants designing a test for a CLIL context is just about the same as for English and only 20% found it very difficult. Second, the main problems they find in assessing CLIL are related to how they can assess students' level of English, even though they tend to focus equally on content and language (third question). Finally, writing a CLIL test usually not design their own assessment tools and resort to existing material to evaluate their students' learning. In accordance with the analysed literature, our answers support the idea that more importance should be given at the university level on the importance of assessment in CLIL contexts. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure the right combination of language and content in assessment practices and this is what training for prospective teachers in CLIL contexts should try to aim to for its successful implementation. Despite the limitations of this pilot study, we believe that we have gained a preliminary insight into this topic and that we have obtained some results that allow us to open a line for future research in such a neglected area.

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Appendix 1: Assessment in CLIL Survey

Question 1: I am teaching CLIL courses

Yes

No

Question 2: When I write tests for classes other than English (such as Natural or Social Sciences), I “copy” activities (with minor changes) that have already been done in class:

Most times

Sometimes

Almost never

Never

Question 3: I consider that writing a test to assess subjects other than English (such as Natural or Social Sciences)

Is very difficult

Is just about the same as for English

Is easier than for English

Question 4: Point the main problems that you consider having when preparing exams for CLIL students

Question 5: In CLIL or bilingual Education, language has

More importance than content

The same importance as content

Less importance than content

Question 6: Do you use alternative assessment tools (portfolios, presentations, others)

Yes, I do not use tests

No

No, I only use tests

Yes, I use both tests and other tools of assessment

Question 7: Do you also consider systematically (and numerically) your observations in class?

No, I do not

Yes, but I do not assign them a grade

Yes, I assign them a grade