



CLIL: Colombia Leading Into Content Language Learning*¹

Mónica Rodríguez Bonces**

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been adopted by many nations as a methodology to reach bilingualism. Nonetheless, the implementation of CLIL in Colombia goes beyond teaching a core area in English. It implies a long process, including multiple factors to achieve success. This article presents a general background of the process of bilingualism in Colombia and how different kinds of institutions approach this governmental policy through a critical reflection. The paper presents the challenges when adopting Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a strategy to achieve bilingualism. Four key aspects are described to reach the goal of having a bilingual territory: language learning approach, teacher training, development of materials, and cultural and intercultural competence. It is argued that bilingualism may be achieved in the long term by addressing these four aspects when implementing CLIL.

Key words: CLIL, bilingualism, curriculum.

El aprendizaje integrado del contenido y el idioma ha sido adoptado por muchas naciones como un modelo en el desarrollo de procesos bilingües. No obstante su implementación en Colombia, va más allá de la enseñanza de otra área de conocimiento en inglés y abarca todo un proceso para lograr su éxito. Este artículo presenta unos lineamientos generales del proceso de bilingüismo en Colombia y cómo diferentes instituciones educativas acatan esta directriz del gobierno a través de la reflexión crítica. El documento presenta los desafíos al adoptar CLIL como una estrategia para lograr el bilingüismo. Cuatro aspectos claves son presentados como una exigencia para lograr un territorio bilingüe: el enfoque en el aprendizaje de una lengua, la formación docente, el desarrollo de materiales y la competencia cultural e intercultural. Se concluye que el bilingüismo puede alcanzarse a largo plazo si se tienen en cuenta estos cuatro aspectos cuando se esté implementando CLIL.

Palabras clave: CLIL, bilingüismo, plan de estudios.

L'Enseignement d'une Matière par l'Intégration à une Langue Etrangère (EMILE) a été adopté par beaucoup de nations comme un modèle de développement du processus de bilinguisme. Toutefois, son adaptation en Colombie va au-delà de l'enseignement d'un autre domaine d'étude en anglais et compromet un processus complet visant à atteindre son

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objectif. Cet article esquisse les lignes générales du processus de bilinguisme en Colombie et les manières dont les différentes institutions éducatives acceptent les directives du gouvernement à travers une réflexion critique. Le document présente les défis inhérents à l'adoption d'EMILE comme stratégie pour arriver au bilinguisme. Le document présente quatre aspects clés requis pour établir un territoire bilingue: l'approche de l'apprentissage d'une langue, la formation de professeurs, le développement des équipements ainsi que la compétence culturelle et interculturelle. Le bilinguisme est possible à long terme si au moment d'adopter EMILE, on met en exécution ces quatre aspects.

Mots-clés: l'Enseignement d'une Matière par l'intégration à une Langue Etrangère (EMILE), le bilinguisme, le curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Colombian Ministry of education, after a long process, drew up the National Bilingualism Program (Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo) in order to recognize Colombian citizens as bilingual. The Colombian Constitution, issued in 1991, declared Colombia as a multilingual and pluricultural nation; this status resulted in the National Ministry of Education's (MEN) creation of a ten-year plan (Plan Decenal de Educación) in order to fulfill the requirements of a new society which was more globalized and open to changes. Afterwards, in 1994, the General Law of Education (Ley General de Educación) established a bilingual and intercultural policy, taking into account different communities in Colombia; for example, creoles in San Andres, or indigenous groups in other areas. In 1999, the General Guidelines for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (Lineamientos generales para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera) appeared as a set of procedures to guide the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Then later, in 2004, the National Bilingual Program (2004-2010) (Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo) came out as a nationwide plan for having a bilingual territory. The declaration of bilingualism as a national policy has been fundamental for the future of education in Colombia. Institutions are required to prepare more competent students and incorporate information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classroom. Besides, many institutions adopted English as the language of instruction, which limited the expansion of other languages like French or German. Additionally, Education Secretariats carried out tests in order to determine the teachers' language proficiency, which resulted in more teacher preparation programs along the country. The

Colombian government restated the National Bilingualism Program, whose main goal now is to have bilingual citizens in the Colombian territory by the end of the year 2019. In order to guarantee that this goal is met, the MEN has decided to use European standards as a reference to evaluate the competence of Colombian citizens. The Common European Framework (CEF) was adopted and adapted as the document guiding the standards of language learning in the country. For instance, one of the goals set in Colombia is to have high school graduates at a B1 level, according to the Common European Framework. Due to the adoption of this Framework, educators and students have to take standard tests in order to demonstrate their having achieved the desired level. Direct consequences of these policies are the fact that many schools offer test preparation programs or have included a certain number of hours for test preparation in their foreign language curriculum. McDougal (2009) considers the new State language curriculum as one describing language proficiency along with associated assessment standards, so that there is transparency and consistency in English language teaching throughout Colombia (p. 45). Nonetheless, school administrators need to guarantee parents that language learning will not be misleading; e.g. teaching for testing instead of teaching for communication. This can only be done by having the educational community involved in the bilingual process. Parents, students, and administrators need to know the expected outcomes from the beginning of the school year. Additionally, students and parents need to get familiar with standards and assessment procedures, so they know how and when students will be evaluated.

2. THE CURRENT CONTEXT FOR CONTENT LANGUAGE LEARNING

In Colombia, bilingual institutions differ from International Baccalaureate (IB) schools and American-style schools since most of the former were created by Colombians, the majority of educators are originally from the country, more than 50% of the syllabus is in English and they use two or more languages during the teaching and learning processes. In addition, most of the students will access the Colombian educational system which means they will attend a Colombian university, and, when finishing high school, they will take an international proficiency exam such as TOEFL or

IELTS, among others. Another group of schools is called “ingles intensivo” (“intensive English”). This group includes institutions that offer 10-15 hours of English per week (Mejía &Tejada, 2001) (See table 1).

Table 1 Types of Bilingual Schools in Colombia

International Bilingual Schools (Colegios bilingües internacionales)	National Bilingual Schools (Colegios bilingües nacionales)	Intensive English Schools (Colegios inglés intensivo)
Schools belong to international organizations. e.g., SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) or IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization)	Students take international exams when they graduate. E.g. TOEFL, IELTS	Students take language proficiency exams during the school years
Students have short stays abroad and most of their further studies are abroad	Most of the students' further studies are in Colombia	Most of the students' further studies are in Colombia
More than 50% of the curriculum is taught in a foreign language	More than 50% of the curriculum is in a foreign language	Students take 10-12 hours of English, not necessarily including a core area like Science or Math
Many of the teachers are foreigners	Most of the teachers are bilingual Colombians	Most of the teachers are monolingual, except the foreign languages ones
Schools were founded by foreigners	Schools were founded by Colombians	Schools were founded by Colombians
Adapted from Mejía (2001).		

In this respect, the Colombian educational system is experiencing new changes that demand educators who can offer a better quality of education to be implemented under these new government policies and in this kind of institutions. The new policies advocate understanding not only the politics of the bilingual education policy, language acquisition and pedagogy, but also the curriculum and instruction for bilingual educators. It was once believed that bilingual education was only in the hands of bilingual schools. However, since all schools need to follow the government rules, they need to change their curricula in order to comply with national and international standards and offer bilingual education. Bilingual education approach is defined here as one in “which two languages are used as media of classroom instruction for the same group of students, so that students receive some of their instruction in one language and some in the other, with the nature and proportion of each language varying according to program type, and instructional goals. (Celce-Murcia, 2001: 345). It is at this moment when

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) appears as an option for those schools that are moving toward bilingualism. Content and Language Integrated Learning is defined by Marsh (2002) as any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content. It is dual-focused because whereas attention may be focused predominantly on either subject-specific content or language, both are always accommodated or, using Graddol's words: "curriculum content and language are taught together" (2005). In the Colombian context, this approach is being implemented in different ways. First, some institutions are incorporating the teaching of at least a core area – content learning. In most cases, science is the most commonly chosen subject since many educators advocate for more practicality, which means teachers may use differentiation strategies while students may do hands-on activities and experiments to learn key concepts. Other schools have increased the number of hours of instruction in order to carry out cross curricular projects or, in most cases, students take five to eight hours of language arts, and four hours of science or social studies. However, not all the schools in Colombia have the same number of school hours. Rural area schools and/or some public and private schools only have two to three hours devoted to a foreign language and/or two of another core area in English for instance, which is more demanding when using a CLIL approach, since students do not have enough exposure to the foreign language. Finally, other schools decide to use English and Spanish as the language of instruction for new areas such as science and math. These schools state that educators can talk about bilingualism only if there is a place for both languages in the classroom. Nonetheless, all schools coincide in the preparation of preschool children by means of language awareness activities, project-based instruction, and a high number of hours of instruction in English, and, in many cases, immersion programs. All in all, bilingual programs benefit from the integration of language and content instruction.

Research projects undertaken in very different contexts (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009; Zarobe, 2008) demonstrate some of the benefits of CLIL. Content language and integrated instruction provide opportunities for learners

to acquire a new language through the study of academic disciplines such as mathematics, science, and social studies. CLIL is an effective way to develop language skills while acquiring academic skills. This type of learning is facilitated as students possess inquiring minds, and they get interested in areas such as math, science, social studies or art, and linguistic skills in their native language. By using CLIL, students get support, and have more opportunities for improving their listening skills, for interaction. Likewise, through CLIL, concepts are reinforced. Hudson (2009) carried out a research project to show how the education reform in EFL countries such as Malaysia is requiring language teachers to be educated in content areas. Findings demonstrate how teachers may enhance science education and language skills when using CLIL. Additionally, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009) analyzed the effects of CLIL on students' attitudes towards EFL; results demonstrated CLIL programs help to foster positive attitudes.

As it has been noted, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has gained popularity in recent years throughout the Colombian territory. Nowadays, educators do not talk about teaching *in* English but teaching *through* English. Colombian schools have used this approach in order to promote project-based learning. For instance, CLIL gives schools the opportunity to do some cross-curricular work. Schools are engaged in high-scale projects that involve more than one content area. Via the use of the target language in other areas, CLIL improves the linguistic proficiency level of students. For instance, English textbooks are not English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) texts anymore but English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) ones. This change means that the key point when learning is not form, but rather what students can do with these structures/functions.

3. LEADING INTO CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING: THE CHALLENGES IN COLOMBIA

In order to achieve bilingual education and make a real success out of CLIL, there are many challenges to overcome. According to Brown, “challenges range from a demand for a whole new range of textbooks and other materials to the training of language teachers to teach the concepts and skills of various

disciplines” (2007: 56). Despite some arguments against CLIL stating that it is too diverse to be widespread in the Colombian context, there are four areas that researchers, educators and anyone else involved in the field need to work on in order for CLIL to suit the Colombian scenario. Those aspects are the following: 1) Language learning approach; 2) Teacher training; 3) Materials’ development; 4) Cultural and intercultural competence

3.1 Language learning approach

One of the arguments against CLIL is the fact that students who speak Spanish and who are learning English face enormous challenges in content areas such as science, math or social studies. However, the inclusion of these areas in the long term will improve language learning and will guarantee social and academic success, which include Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP); both of them comprising part of the basis for CLIL.

Following a CLIL approach requires teachers and school administrators to refine language teaching. Communication goes beyond merely using grammatical concepts; communication implies meaningful learning including learning by doing. CLIL is about “using the language to learn and learning to use languages” (Marsh & Langé, 2000: 1).

3.2 Teacher training

In Colombia, teacher training programs in CLIL are scarce. As a consequence, it is mandatory to have trained teachers who can design and apply effective strategies to integrate those core areas within a process of language acquisition. Educators need to understand they are teaching specific concepts before teaching a language. It is necessary to have teachers who are specialized in the area of knowledge they are teaching. It is very normal in many Colombian schools to see English teachers teaching science, math or social studies. However, when doing some class observations, one easily realizes that they spend most of the time teaching the language rather than the concepts. Schools need to support professional development by provi-

ding English teachers with the opportunity of completing a B.A. or B.S. in other core areas, or by supporting core area teachers taking English classes to acquire the necessary language proficiency.

In Colombia, it is also frequent to identify schools where a subject-matter teacher and a language teacher link their courses so that each one complements the other (Brown, 2007: 56). In this case, CLIL comes in as a first step toward promoting bilingualism and interdisciplinary work. One can not say a language teacher will be a better core-area teacher or vice versa. One can say teachers may use their knowledge and other expertise to carry out some cross curricular connections and make language learning a meaningful and enriching opportunity.

It is also necessary to offer programs on bilingual education. There are not many universities that offer bilingual teacher-preparation programs in Colombia. It is also advisable to offer short term CLIL courses designed for pre-service and in-service teachers; in this way, educators will better understand how content and language go together (McDougal, 2009).

3.3 Materials' development

The process of selecting potential textbooks, resources and materials takes great importance in a context where CLIL is the way to achieve bilingualism. Colombia, like many other Latin American countries, has a history of textbooks specialized in ELT/ EFL programs. Implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning demands material that until recent years was exclusively used by international, American-style or bilingual schools. Publishers like Houghton Mifflin Harcourt offer materials that support content language learning. However, there is a lack of material designed for the Colombian context and curricula exclusively. As a consequence, there may be a discrepancy between the adopted curriculum and the Colombian one. For example, when studying social studies, the Colombian curriculum requires a textbook that focuses on Colombian geography and history and there is not one. Another example is related to science. In the Colombian case a cycle is finished in third grade; then, in fifth grade students take the “Pruebas

Saber”, a test of knowledge. Nonetheless, there is not a science book that has the same pace the Colombian Standards demand and as a result educators adapt what is in the market. The described situation shows how urgent it is to choose textbooks that support CLIL and follow national standards.

CLIL requires educators to choose textbooks that do the following:

1. Display appropriate academic content related to the language learners’ cultural environment.
2. Present graded language and activities that include differentiation in order to facilitate learning. Content language and Integrated Learning requires the linguistic domain not to pose a difficulty when evaluating concepts.
3. State clear outcomes in terms of language and concepts.
4. Have accurate selection and grading according to local contexts.

3.4 Cultural and intercultural competence

Bilingual education implies the use of at least two languages as a means of instruction (Genesee, 2004; Siguán & Mackey, 1986 in Celce-Murcia, 2001), which means that the first language should not be put aside. Educators need to be aware that culture is inherent to the language. “Being able to understand one’s own culture allows educators and apprentices to accept the new one, to compare and contrast, and to understand different life views around the world” (Rodríguez, 2003: 70). Content and Language Integrated Learning will be facilitated because cultural and intercultural aspects will enrich the class environment. Students will better understand new concepts if they can relate them to their immediate reality and context. Science, math, and social studies will not only enrich the apprehension of linguistic features and concepts, but also that of culture. In science, for instance, when studying the weather, students can compare how climate affects ways of living around the world and their own life. Likewise, in social studies, when studying families, students can describe kinds of families around the world. This means that CLIL exposes students to diverse realities belonging to content areas. Another point that should be taken into account in order to

promote bilingualism and cultural awareness has to do with the teaching of local history and geography. Colombian social studies and history should be taught in the mother language; this teaching will guarantee students to appropriate elements of their own background.

4. CONCLUSION

CLIL is an approach that can empower bilingual programs in Colombia. CLIL focuses both on content and language learning, which means that its implementation requires adequate preparation, especially in societies like the Colombian one, where a considerable background in EFL programs exists. Language is integrated into the broad curriculum, a reason that, according to practitioners, is based on language acquisition rather than learning. As it can be seen, CLIL is a challenge in the Colombian context, especially if one wants to offer quality in education. Nonetheless, when this approach is correctly incorporated, cultural and intercultural competences are taken into account, language competence is improved and concepts are learned. The various caveats against CLIL may be accepted or refused depending on how educators deal with this approach. Colombia is now leading (meaning: guiding) language learning since it is adapting CLIL to its current situation. There is much to be done in terms of language learning approach, teacher training, materials' development, and cultural and intercultural competence, but in the long term, language learning and bilingualism may be mastered.

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AUTHOR

- ** Mónica Rodríguez Bonces is currently pursuing her PhD in Education. She has done recognized research on Autonomy, Culture and Language Learning. Part of this experience can be reviewed in published articles in national and international publications. She is also the co-author the text *Breaking Through an English Course* (UPN-2007) and *World prints* (UPN-2010). She is a researcher at Universidad Central where she coordinates the research project “El diseño de un currículo que integra la música y el arte dramático como dispositivos pedagógicos”. Monica Rodríguez is also the Academic Coordinator at UNICA. E-mail: mrodriguezbonces@gmail.com