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Content and Language Integrated Learning as an Approach to Foreign Language Learning in Kazakhstan under Conditions of Polylingual Education

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Abstract

The problem we are raising in this article is how to teach English with the help of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). This method of teaching foreign languages is not a new one, but it became very topical in our country in light of the recent changes in the policy of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This paper attempts to reveal problems in the implementation of this policy and give some recommendations on further projects provided by the government of Kazakhstan in teaching English to subject teachers on the basis of a questionnaire.

Keywords: *Trinity of Languages, Content and Language Integrated Learning, Educational Reform*

Introduction

The Ministry launched a new reform which was declared in a ten-year strategic program to transform the whole education system both in terms of structure and teaching. Most clearly the problems and prospects of the language situation in modern Kazakhstan are reflected by the President of the country, N. Nazarbayev, (2007) in the language strategy "Trinity of languages". The essence of the given platform in the strategy "Trinity of languages" is defined as follows:

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studying the Kazakh language – as the state language, Russian – as the language of international communication and English – as the language of successful integration into the global economy. According to the Program of development and functioning of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020, in relation to polylingual education, it is planned to increase shares of the population of the Republic who know English by 2014 – 10%, by 2017 – 15%, by 2020 – 20%; shares of the population knowing three languages (state, Russian and English) by 2014 – 10%, by 2017 – 12%, by 2020 – to 15%. (Yausheva, 2017)

The fact that the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan accepted the introduction of teaching not only three languages, but also some subjects in English, is certainly a very important and challenging step towards the new reform in Kazakhstan's education system. Speaking three languages will broaden our young generation's outlook, contribute to their cultural development and form a new vision of the world.

Literature Review

CLIL has begun to be used extensively in a variety of language learning contexts in Europe, although in the past number of years increasing attention has been given to integrating language and content, partly due to the need to promote language development in different language educational programs. Content-based approaches to L2 instruction were first introduced in French immersion education in Canada and in North American bilingual language teaching programs in the mid-1960s. (Singleton, 2009) In the current CLIL literature, we find references to different origins. In the Canadian and American versions of CLIL, we should mention the works by Brinton *et al.* (2004), Cantoni-Harvey (1987), Celce-Murcia (1991) or Mohan (1986). In the European context, we should note, among others, the works by Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2007), Fruhauf *et al.* (1996), Marsh (2002), Marsh *et al.* (2001) and the Eurydice survey (Eurydice, 2006), which describes the state of the art of European CLIL experiences. Mohan *et al.* (2001) describe the situation in countries such as Canada, England, and Australia.

Foreign language learning has traditionally been a weak point in Kazakhstan education. According to British Council researchers in Kazakhstan in terms of English language education, there are a variety of means and tools to develop English in our country. People are highly motivated to learn English. A methodological base, new teaching programs, and new study materials are being developed. (CUP, 2016)

Educational Reform in progress

Beginning from January 2017 there have been taken some definite steps in the realization of this reform. First of all, it was implemented to all curriculum at secondary and high schools and universities. It means that 33 % of subjects will be taught in different languages so that three languages comprise 100 %. As for the English language, it is the language of instruction for only four subjects: Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Computer Science. We don't face problems with Kazakh and Russian languages because more than two-thirds of the population of our country can speak both languages. The real challenge is teaching English as a foreign language because schools

are not provided with a sufficient number of subject teachers who can teach in English. On the other hand, English language teachers are not qualified to provide this teaching. To solve this problem, the Ministry of Education launched another program. According to it, in November 2016 subject teachers (not English language teachers) from our University received a scholarship and were taught an intensive course of English for four weeks in-class and four weeks online. The organizing company of that course was Swiss American Academy which is now opening its branch in Kazakhstan. They provided each student with materials through their site and educational platform www.saasa.ch. The main characteristic features of their methods are the following:

- each lesson is structured with a pre-test, the main lesson and a post-test with the opportunity to retake post-tests to achieve a grade that reflects mastery;

- courses earn U.S. academic credit;

- in the SAA Leadership Program: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focused Project Based Learning is led by tutors from Oxford and Cambridge.

All the above-mentioned facts are considered to be true except the last one, as nearly all tutors were Kazakh citizens from local universities.

Content and Language Integrated Learning Intensive Course

In order to find out the effectiveness of that course and analyze certain results, we conducted a survey among participants of this course. The questionnaire included eight questions such as: location of the course, the level students acquired at the course and their level four months later, methods they liked most of all, drawbacks of the course, the ways students use their skills today, what they do in order to improve their English today, and we also asked our respondents to write some recommendation on the course.

As for location, there have been three universities hosting our respondents which are considered to be among the top leading universities of Kazakhstan, they are Kazakh National Polytechnic University, Kazakh National University, and Karaganda State University. Each of them hosted 500 students for this course. Taraz State Pedagogical Institute was represented by 50 non-English language teachers among whom we hold this interview and obtained the following results.

Analysis

We identified their English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, abbreviated in [English](#) as CEFR. The results of the placement test showed A1 (beginner) for 30 % and A2 (elementary) for 70 %. It means that 30 % can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. They are able to introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have. They also can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. The majority of respondents showed better results as they are able to understand sentences and frequently

used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment); can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters; can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. In this respect we should take into consideration that all the participants had zero level at the beginning of the course, it means that they either didn't study English at school or the teaching was very poor. This thing was also described in the research project of British Council as the weakness of our English language education. They enumerated a number of facts among which the following are the most typical:

- ✓ Weak professional preparation of teaching staff;
- ✓ Resources and textbooks are not well developed;
- ✓ Weak vocational education system;
- ✓ 67-70% of regional universities are at a low level;
- ✓ No courses for developing skills, creativity, or analysis, international experience has not been adopted. (CUP, 2016)

The next question was about the method of teaching which impressed the respondents most of all. To this question 25 % of students didn't give any answer, 40 % wrote some general ideas like American and Swiss methodology and only the rest determined some certain methods. They pointed out several methods as the project method, critical thinking, and online learning. It's relevant to mention that many teachers (about 15 %) distinguished content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in teaching English as a foreign language.

In the next point of our questionnaire we tried to reveal some drawbacks of the given course among which 5 % of our teachers didn't see any problems; the rest pointed out such shortcomings as accommodations and some financial problems (they were not provided with dormitories or hotels, so they had to rent apartments) – 5%, too many classes and too much workload a day (there were 8 classes per day) – 10%. In contrast with the latter, 15% specified the lack of the time for this course, so that it might be recommended to lower the number of classes per day and prolong the duration of the course. The insufficient number of smart interactive boards, multimedia classes and language labs was noted by 1/5 part of all respondents; and the biggest part – 40 % insisted on disorganization of the course, but they didn't specify what they meant. Probably they were not satisfied with the general organization of the course including all the shortcomings mentioned above.

Then, we have been interested in the way the respondents are using the English language skills now. In learning and mastering any foreign language this point is rather important because without application one might easily forget nearly everything in just two months. That is why usage is even more effective than learning. As for our teachers, half of them don't use English at all; 10 % attend English language courses and only the rest, 40 %, conduct classes in Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science in English. As we can see only this part use English in a serious way and probably they are the only people worthwhile to be engaged in this reform.

The aim of the next point was to determine respondents' level of English acquired during the course and compare it with the present one. As it's been already mentioned above nearly all the participants had zero level at the beginning and got A1 and A2 in the end. According to their response, only 15 % upgraded their level to B1 (intermediate). Now they can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They're also able to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken and produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest, describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Conclusion

Based on the results of our research we may say that STEM-focused Project Based Learning educational program for Intensive English used by Swiss-American Academy proved its effectiveness regarding the achieved results as the majority of participants (70 %) reached the beginning level. The best methods the tutors used were pointed out by our teachers as the project-based method, CLIL, critical thinking and online learning. It should be mentioned that these methods are not developed in our educational system and that it might be predicted that students highlighted them.

As for the curriculum, it might be recommended to lower the number of classes per day and prolong the duration of the course.

Studying the results of the number of respondents using English after the course we realized that only 40 % of them use it practically, so it means that not all the teachers need to learn English right now and the best way out is to make a thorough preliminary analysis of schools' demand. It is evident that this part of the participants is improving their skills in practice and has increased the level of English from elementary up to intermediate.

Finally, the teachers gave some recommendations to improve the organization and quality of such courses in future as to use only English language in class and to have English native speakers as instructors, to attend such courses in English speaking countries and to have more continuing courses at least once a year. All of them expressed their strong desire to continue their education in English till they reach C1 level.

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