



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

System

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/system](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/system)

# CLIL in minimal input contexts: A longitudinal study of primary school learners' receptive skills



Elisabet Pladevall-Ballester<sup>a, \*</sup>, Anna Vallbona<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Departament de Filologia anglesa i de Germanística, Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres. Edifici B. Carrer de la Fortuna, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), 08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain*

<sup>b</sup> *Departament de Filologia i de Didàctica de la Llengua i la Literatura, Facultat d'Educació, Traducció i Ciències Humanes, Universitat de Vic -Universitat Central de Catalunya (UVic-UCC), C Sagrada Família 7, 08500 Vic, Barcelona, Spain*

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 8 May 2015

Received in revised form 16 February 2016

Accepted 27 February 2016

Available online 25 March 2016

### Keywords:

CLIL

EFL

Young learners

Receptive skills

Longitudinal study

## ABSTRACT

In an attempt to contribute experimental data to the study of CLIL learning outcomes, this paper explores the effect that exposure to CLIL had on the development and achievement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) receptive skills in a primary school context. Two groups of young learners, one exposed only to EFL sessions and the other one exposed to EFL sessions and an additional CLIL hour per week, were administered a language test at four different times during two academic years. In order to guarantee comparability between the groups, amount of exposure to the target language up to each testing time was kept the same. Results show that in contexts of minimal and equal exposure, CLIL has no remarkable effects, although significant intragroup progress is observed in both contexts. No significant differences are found between the groups with regard to reading skills, and the control group (i.e. EFL-only exposure) significantly outperforms the experimental group (i.e. EFL + CLIL exposure) in their listening skills. Findings seem to suggest that more promising CLIL learning outcomes might only be observable in the long run with more intensive exposure.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The implementation of CLIL programmes has become commonplace in most European educational systems. Although CLIL has traditionally been considered a broad, flexible and inclusive umbrella term, which has encompassed many forms of immersion and bilingual education within the European context, it has recently become a label to designate an “innovative, modern, effective, efficient and forward looking” form of foreign language teaching and learning (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, & Smit, 2010, p. 3). CLIL programmes have been seen as a way of providing extra contact time with the foreign language (Elsner & Keßler, 2013), as they allow for an increase in the number of hours of contact with the target language without having to change and extend already crammed curriculums. They have also been considered a way to improve the overall target language competence of the learners. These two quite widespread ideas have not yet been clearly supported by reliable accurate research, at least in the context of primary education (Bruton, 2011, 2013; Cenoz, Genesse & Gorter, 2014; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). This paper addresses the influence that minimal exposure to CLIL may have had on the development and

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 935811567.

E-mail addresses: [elisabet.pladevall@uab.cat](mailto:elisabet.pladevall@uab.cat) (E. Pladevall-Ballester), [anna.vallbona@uvic.cat](mailto:anna.vallbona@uvic.cat) (A. Vallbona).

achievement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) receptive skills (i.e. listening and reading) of primary school children over a two-year period. It further analyzes development and achievement taking into account the students' level of reading and listening skills at the start of the study.

Despite the general claims about the beneficial effects of CLIL on language acquisition (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, 2008; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2011, 2015), and the success of CLIL programmes in most European systems, CLIL is still a relatively innovative approach in education, and reliable research is still incipient (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010; Navés & Victori, 2010). Claims about the beneficial effects of CLIL have so far been made offering a rather “evangelical picture of the benefits” of the approach (Banegas, 2011, p. 183). Research at the micro level, with a clear focus on CLIL participants (teachers and students), methods and forms of classroom practice has not yet been widely addressed (Bruton, 2011, 2013; Cenoz et al., 2014; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). Language development in CLIL and EFL settings should be analyzed and evaluated in a more rigorous, longitudinal and systematic way in order to be able to compare the two instructional approaches, before purported benefits of the CLIL approach can be realistically claimed. Only in clear, comparable contexts can the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of CLIL be explored. As Bruton (2011) pointed out, one of the most crucial issues for CLIL research is to determine whether the combination EFL + CLIL might be more, or simply as effective, as EFL alone, if the number of hours of exposure is kept the same between the groups, which is one of the main aims of this paper. It is of fundamental importance that research takes into account a range of variables, including the school context, the amount of in-class and extracurricular exposure to the language, as well as the students' previous exposure to the target language. As Coyle (2007, 2012) pointed out, examining each particular context where CLIL is implemented is of utmost importance before claiming its effectiveness.

## 2. Language learning benefits in CLIL programmes

A growing body of empirical research mainly carried out in Europe has explored the possible linguistic benefits of students exposed to CLIL programmes, and compared them to those obtained by students in regular mainstream non-CLIL programmes. Evidence from these studies seems to emphasize general positive effects on the development of CLIL learners' foreign language competence and skills, mainly oral fluency, written lexical complexity, receptive vocabulary and reading and listening skills (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, 2008; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2011). However, these claims have been made without taking into account the differences between specific CLIL contexts and, most importantly, the different ages and conditions of exposure of the participants. As CLIL is a relatively new trend in Primary education, research results concerning young learners are still scarce. Järvinen (2005), in a study conducted with Primary students in Scandinavia, found that CLIL students from grades 1 through to 5 produced more complex and accurate sentences than their non-CLIL counterparts from grades 3 to 5, as the former had higher exposure to English per week. In a different context, Jiménez-Catalán, Ruiz de Zarobe and Cenoz (2006) compared CLIL and non-CLIL Spanish primary learners in order to assess their English knowledge and use. They administered receptive vocabulary tests and they examined the students' productive vocabulary by means of a composition. They reported advantages in favour of CLIL students in the reading comprehension task as well as in the students' lexical richness and sophistication. Jiménez-Catalán and Ruiz de Zarobe (2009), Moreno Espinosa (2009) and Ojeda Alba (2009) also provided significant evidence in favour of CLIL groups in terms of receptive vocabulary size. As mentioned above, these studies provided cross-sectional data and did not compare the two instructional settings taking into account amount of exposure.

Other studies that included listening and/or reading skills have also shown variability in their results. Stotz and Meuter (2003) conducted a study in which they analyzed the listening and speaking skills of young primary Swiss students. They concluded that CLIL positively affected the learners' receptive listening skills, whereas their results on the speaking skills were not very conclusive. In a different context, and in secondary education, a four-year longitudinal study carried out by Admiraal, Westhoff and De Graaff (2006) showed evidence that, after being exposed to four years of CLIL, the students performed better in reading comprehension and oral proficiency than in receptive vocabulary knowledge. Along the same lines, Ruiz de Zarobe and Jiménez-Catalán (2009) also provided empirical evidence that there is a mismatch between receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills seem to benefit much more from the CLIL approach. The results obtained by Lasagabaster (2008), in a study conducted with 198 secondary students, showed that CLIL students obtained better results than their non-CLIL counterparts of the same grade in the four areas tested: listening, reading, writing and speaking. However, in a comparison between students of different ages (the CLIL group was a year younger than the non-CLIL one), CLIL students outperformed the non-CLIL ones except in the listening comprehension task. This outcome was also observed in Navés (2011), who also pointed out that CLIL students outperformed non-CLIL students from three years ahead in different skills including reading comprehension skills, grammar proficiency, written fluency and lexical and syntactic complexity. More recently, in the Catalan context, Pérez-Vidal and Roquet (2015) provided evidence of the limitations in listening skills of secondary students enrolled in CLIL programmes when compared to their non-CLIL counterparts. The CLIL students in this study outperformed their non-CLIL counterparts in other aspects such as reading, writing and lexico-grammatical competence. Previous research displays a great deal of variability. While reading skills seem to be more positively affected by CLIL, the results in the listening skills appear less conclusive and therefore, further research is needed to corroborate predicted positive outcomes, particularly in the context of young learners.

Whereas research on the effects of CLIL on the learners' listening and reading skills is not scarce, this is not the case for the effect of students' level of EFL receptive skills at the start of the study on their subsequent development. Studies carried out in Finland have taken into account the students' starting level of school readiness (Merisuo-Storm, 2006, 2007) and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/372992>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/372992>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)