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CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING: HOW BENEFICIAL IS IT FOR THE STUDENT

The topic under consideration is content and language integrated learning, an approach to teaching with a dual focus on professional training and language acquisition. The objective is to identify if English-language programs are beneficial to School of Business of BSU students and how foreign language proficiency correlates with professional training in the foreign language.

Keywords: *CLIL, content and language integrated learning, foreign language communicative competence, professional competence, professional training, higher education*

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ПРЕДМЕТНО-ЯЗЫКОВОЕ ИНТЕГРИРОВАННОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ: В ЧЕМ ПОЛЬЗА ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТА

В статье рассматривается предметно-языковой интегрированный подход к обучению, двойная цель которого – профессиональная подготовка и овладение языком. Приводятся результаты анализа эмпирических данных, позволивших определить, приносят ли пользу студентам Института бизнеса БГУ программы с обучением на английском языке и как уровень владения иностранным языком соотносится с осуществляемой на нем профессиональной подготовкой.

Ключевые слова: *предметно-языковое интегрированное обучение, иноязычная коммуникативная компетенция, профессиональная компетенция, профессиональная подготовка, система высшего образования*

Introduction. In recent years, Belarusian universities have been increasingly introducing bachelor and master programs with English being the language of instruction, which seems a natural development, given the continuing globalization. The School of Business of BSU has been in the forefront of this positive trend and has already accumulated a profound experience of providing training in a foreign language. MBA and BBA programs can be considered well-established; new programs have just been added to the portfolio (bachelor in Marketing and Logistics; master in Financial Management and HR-management). With the initial goal of attracting as many foreign students as possible (to boost export of educational services), it has turned into a lucrative type of education for Belarusians as well. The level of language proficiency at the stage of «input» varies, raising questions on the part of academic staff. In this regard, it seems logical to reflect on the approach to teaching known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) with regard to School of Business.

Data and methodology. The research question is whether content and language integrated learning is beneficial to university students and how foreign language proficiency correlates with professional training in a foreign language. The objectives are to identify whether we can consider instruction within School of Business of BSU English programs as implementation of CLIL, to get an insight into the CLIL approach for professional training and its benefits to the student. In a nutshell, is it CLIL we are employing and is the game worth the candle?

The work is based on the secondary research into the topic of CLIL and the analysis of the empirical data collected by the author in 2021 via distributing a questionnaire in Google forms. The study is both

quantitative and qualitative in nature. The source of data is the School of Business bachelor students who are enrolled into the programs with English being the language of instructions. The number of students surveyed is 60, with 38,3 % (23 respondents) being in the first year, 31,7 % (19) and 28,3 % (17) in the second and the third year respectively; 1,7 % (1) is in the final year.

The questions are related to (1) the assessment of the student's English proficiency, the progress made while taking professional courses in English and the areas of language usage where most improvement has been observed, (2) factors within professional courses which contribute to communicative competence, (3) the relevance of the foreign language course content to the student's development of professional skills. Thus, the questions are aimed to find the English programs' relevance to CLIL.

Defining CLIL. The idea of Content and Language Integrated Learning dates back to ancient Rome where upper middle classes preferred to give their children education in Greek as well as Latin. The term and its definitions emerged a lot later, one of them given by the European Commission: «Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language...» [1].

CLIL is considered an «umbrella term», and, as Gene Thompson and Jim McKinley put it, there are quite a number of approaches «to content-centered learning in a second language... [which] include bilingual education, immersion, content-based instruction (CBI), content-based language teaching (CBLT), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and English medium instruction (EMI)» [2].

Despite the ambiguity of these terms, they imply «situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language» [3]. «English-medium instruction» is similar as it «refers to the use of English as the language of instruction in content classes for students who use it as an addition language» [2]. The latter, however, implies isolation in a foreign-language environment, not the case in Belarus. For the purposes of this study, it seems possible to use the term «CLIL».

To support teachers with CLIL, D. Coyle developed the 4C's model incorporating four aspects of CLIL approach, namely, Content (subject matter), Communication (language usage), Cognition (mental processes) and Culture (cultural awareness) [4], where communication is instrument for realization of the other three aspects.

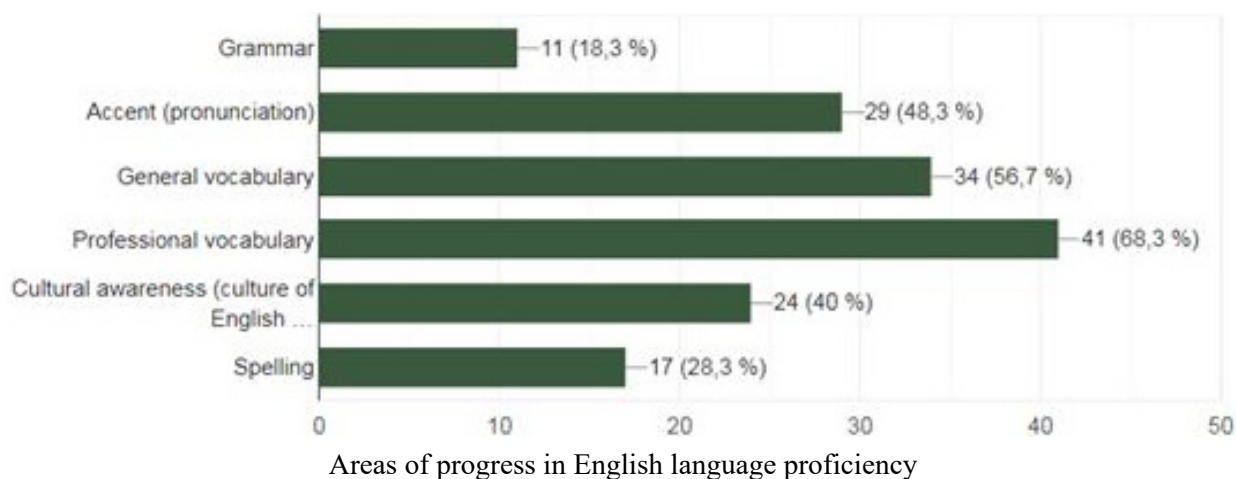
The methodology needs to be adapted for the student to perceive the content due to its significance, while at the same time it is necessary to provide authentic educational materials. The strong factor is the student's willingness to face the challenge and a sense of true achievement.

Empirical findings and discussion. English-language programs have other obvious advantages to students – they provide equal chance of study to people with various levels of language proficiency, which is illustrated by the survey. According to the SB students' assessments, 6,7 % have level B1 or lower (mostly, first-year), while the majority (71,7 %) has B2-C1, and 21,7 % – C2 (mostly, third-year). The mixed-ability classroom is a challenge to the instructor, requiring a selection of materials and personalized approach to every student, but it provides additional motivation to the student and makes teaching worthwhile. Moreover, the programs' main goal is more than merely developing communicative competence.

Despite content-oriented objectives, 76,7 % of the students report that professional training with English as the language of instruction helps to master the language; 15 % are not sure and only 8,3 % give a negative response. It turns out that English medium learning of professional content offers complementary opportunities for English language practice. The areas of language usage where progress is accounted for by sufficient practice provided within the professional courses taught in English include the following:

- speaking (76,7 %) = cognition, communication;
- comprehending audio/video (55 %) = content, cognition, culture;
- reading (35 %) = content, cognition, culture;
- writing (35 %) = content, cognition, communication.

The areas where most progress has been observed by the student can be seen in Figure. The areas reveal enriching professional vocabulary (68,3 %) = content, cognition; improving accent (48,3 %) = communication, and raising cultural awareness (40 %) = cognition, culture.



Source: author's developed on the basis of survey.

Notably, 65 % perceive that the benefit of the English program for language proficiency can be accounted for by the fact that lecturers/instructors of the professional courses pay special attention to the language usage and/or correct the student's language errors, while 18,3 % are not sure and 16,7 % of responses are negative. The figures give food for thought as one of the disadvantages is in the instructor themselves: some may focus solely on content. The responses show that instructors need to be attentive to students' language accuracy. On the other hand, the ability to communicate in the proper context is more valuable than knowing grammar rules without using them in work-related settings.

Another area of study is to look into the English language courses. The survey results show that 85 % consider the content of the English course relevant to their professional area of study; 10 % are not sure and 5 % respond negatively. Besides, 80 % believe the foreign language course develops competences which will be in demand in the future professional activity, with 13,3 % being uncertain about it and only 6,7 % – having no idea.

The survey reveals that even if we do not use the term «content and language integrated learning», in actual fact, the English-language programs at SB BSU serve dual purpose of providing business education in English and language training for business communication. The 4 C's component model is applied, and every course is relevant to extensive language practice and professional content. Cultural awareness increases due to use of authentic materials; fluency and accuracy complement one another.

Conclusion. The analysis shows that the SB students perceive immersion in the English-language classroom environment beneficial to their language proficiency and find the English course content equally useful and relevant to their future profession. Whatever the challenge, it is undoubtedly worthwhile. Both an English course instructor and a professional course lecturer can practice CLIL, both can provide content coupled with language training. What is needed is a holistic approach to teaching, as well as collaboration among the academic staff to align the courses' content (syllabi) and develop an integrated methodology to effectively provide professional knowledge and language skills.

It is necessary to conclude by saying that the study looked into the content and language integrated learning from the students' perspective and is subjective, limited to SB BSU context only.

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