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Professional development of CLIL teachers in Poland**

Summary

Supporting CLIL teachers in developing skills for content and language integration is not an easy task as most of them were trained either as language or as content specialists. With CLIL teaching becoming more popular in Poland, there is a growing interest in providing more opportunities for continuous professional development. The aim of this paper is threefold, to explore the current research literature on CLIL teachers' professional development, to present the results of survey research exploring the professional development needs of CLIL teachers in Poland and finally to formulate some recommendations for organizing professional development initiatives for CLIL teachers.

Keywords: CLIL approach, in-service professional development, teacher collaboration, forms of professional development

Introduction

Despite the differences among bilingual approaches around the world, research confirms the importance of well-prepared teachers for effective instruction (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Papaja, 2013, Pavón Vázquez & Ellison 2013; Pérez-Cañado, 2018). There are many different labels used in reference to bilingual education programs. These include, among the others, immersion, content-based

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instruction (CBI), English medium instruction (EMI), or most frequently used in the European context, content and language integrated learning (CLIL). In all of them, the teachers' knowledge base and pedagogical skills have been found to be extremely complex (Lo, 2020; Lyster & Tedick, 2014; Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Tedick & Zilmer, 2018). As CLIL was defined as "(...) a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, p. 1), it is exactly its duality of focus that becomes the challenge for learners, and teachers, as well as teacher educators.

Supporting bilingual teachers in the development of skills for content and language integration is not an easy task because teachers, who currently practice, were trained either as language or as content specialists. Therefore, they received a limited preparation to integrate content and language skills (Tedick & Zilmer, 2020). Also, teacher education institutions do not sufficiently address the integration as they fail to include dual focused learning tasks or assessments. This difficulty is also exacerbated by the shortage of faculty members with bilingual teaching experience. While subject content teaching faculties does not often have sufficient language awareness, language teaching educators also do not have the needed subject content area expertise (Lo, 20017; Villabona & Cenoz, 2021).

In addition, CLIL teacher education is troubled by many institutional constraints, which could also prevent developing skills in content and language integration. These constraints include lack of standards of CLIL teacher education, segmentation of teacher education to content and language subjects, or disconnect of theory and practice (Brzosko-Barratt, 2019; Pérez Cañado, 2018).

In Poland, the first sections of bilingual education date back to 1991 and were originally limited to high-school levels. In 1999 bilingual education was also broadened to include lower secondary schools' level (Polish: *gimnazjum*). In 2017, in the light of the newest educational reform in Poland, which eliminated middle schools, bilingual education has been moved to the last grades of primary school (grades 7–8). According to the CLIL provision in Poland, anyone with the content subject qualifications and the language certificate at B2 level can provide instruction bilingually. There are no other qualification requirements for the teachers.

With CLIL teaching becoming more popular in Poland, there is a growing interest in providing teachers with more opportunities for continuous professional development. The aim of this paper is then threefold, to explore the current research literature on CLIL teachers' professional development, to present the results of survey research exploring the professional development needs of CLIL teachers in Poland, and finally, to formulate some recommendations for organizing professional development initiatives for bilingual teachers.

Literature review

Frameworks of CLIL teacher education

With the growing popularity of CLIL teaching around the world, researchers attempted to draw up some theoretical conceptualizations of CLIL teacher knowledge and skills. There are two available frameworks that attempt to present professional development areas needed for CLIL teaching: The CLIL Teachers Competencies Grid (Bertaux et al., 2010) and The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (Marsh et al., 2010). The first document attempts to chart key competences to support CLIL development in a variety of contexts. This framework is divided into two primary sections: “Underpinning CLIL” and “Setting CLIL in motion”. The first related to “laying the foundation for establishing and maintaining a CLIL programme”, the second explores the skills needed for implementing CLIL, i.e., the first relates to theoretical, administrative, and policy issues and the second to CLIL practice. In the European Framework for CLIL Teaching, the authors provided areas for both experienced and less experienced teachers. In this framework, CLIL related areas include: CLIL fundamentals, content and language awareness, methodology and assessment, and learning resources and environment. They are according to the authors the key competences for CLIL practitioners and relate to the practice of integrating different aspects inherent to CLIL in a professional manner, and ability to implement them in a classroom. In addition, the authors included personal reflection, classroom management, and research and evaluation. Although they contribute to specific CLIL points, they also pertain more to general competences. They were both created as tools for developing teacher training programs and serve as “points of reference for discussions pertaining to CLIL teaching and teacher development” (Bertaux et al., 2010). As these frameworks were helpful in identifying professional development needs, they were not designed to embrace many contextual variables, the actual classroom practice regarding CLIL teachers’ professional roles, their everyday teaching challenges, and professional learning needs.

CLIL teachers’ professional development areas

As CLIL approach is used in a variety of settings at all levels of education ranging from early primary to tertiary, CLIL teachers themselves do not constitute a homogenous group. Previous research showed that to some degree their teaching insecurities were related to educational backgrounds and teaching contexts (Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Lo, 2020; Pérez-Cañado, 2018). Most often, CLIL teachers fit the two categories: they are L2 teachers, who obtained subject content qualifications, or they are content subject teachers who have L2 language

skills that allow them to teach a subject content in this language. With so much variation among the teachers, any professional development activities will have to address their diversified needs.

L2 proficiency of CLIL teachers is one area that was broadly debated in research, specifically at the onset of CLIL popularity. Immersion teachers are known to be the native speakers of L2, while CLIL teachers are usually non-native speakers of the target language. However, native-like language competence is not required from CLIL teachers. Many European countries require some language qualifications frequently at a minimum of B2 level. Their language proficiency depended on such factors as teachers' education but also on the study abroad experience (Pérez-Cañado, 2018). Research confirms that a lack of sufficient language skills brought some uneasiness to them (Pavon-Vazquez & Ellison, 2013). In the Spanish studies CLIL teachers felt insecure about their fluency and their general level of English (Fernández & Halbach, 2011; Lorenzo et al., 2009). In a large European survey, the preschool and early primary teachers also experienced problems in various linguistic competences, especially language for communication, but also in pronunciation and fluency (Pérez-Cañado, 2018; Ruiz-Gomez, 2015). In addition, researchers also explored the nature of competence that is needed when undertaking CLIL teaching. Morton (2018) attempted to conceptualize the types of language knowledge and proficiency for successful content and language integration. He argued that simply improving general language proficiency does not sufficiently prepare for CLIL teaching. Therefore, he introduced the construct of "language knowledge for content teaching", which was seen as necessary when teaching specific subjects. This type of linguistic knowledge, closely related to the content, was found to be more important for CLIL teachers to obtain than general language proficiency.

Another area of research, which received much attention in recent years is the integration of content and language which constitutes the core of bilingual teaching. The studies in immersion contexts showed that developing teachers' skills in content and language integration cannot be limited to obtaining practical skills (Lyster & Tedick, 2014; Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). The complexity of the integration was further conceptualized in the European context by Nikula et al. (2016) on three perspectives. These three perspectives included: curriculum and pedagogy planning, participant perspectives and beliefs, and finally actual classroom practices (Nikula et al., 2016). Integration of curriculum and pedagogy planning perspective concerns both what and how to integrate on all levels reaching from the curriculum level to lesson planning. This perspective is specifically difficult to implement into educational practice as it requires much collaboration on institutional and individual levels. The second perspective relates to the teachers' own beliefs regarding their perceptions about integration. As CLIL teachers are

frequently content teachers they might not see the language component as their teaching responsibility, or they might not feel they have necessary language for supporting language instruction while teaching content. The final perspective is related to classroom practices and concerns how content and language are learnt in integration. Research focusing on teacher development in content and language integration is scarce, and the existing studies confirm that the transition that teachers undergo requires deeper transformation and has to be supported by ample time and resources (Tedick & Zillmer, 2018). The professional development activities contributed however to better understanding of connections between language and content (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012).

Collaboration is one of the pillars of effective CLIL instruction. It is hoped that it would allow the teachers who do not always have the same expertise in both language and content to provide the dual focused instruction. Despite these strong arguments for collaboration, research studies indicate that there are many obstacles of effective collaboration in CLIL settings. These constraints include a lack of central policy, differences in teachers' perceptions of their expertise or lack of communication channels. Some studies pointed out that some differences in the teachers' willingness to collaborate were related to the teachers' beliefs. In the study from Hong Kong secondary content teachers were more focused on covering content dictated by the syllabi in order to prepare their students for external examinations and did not see the need for such collaboration with language specialists (Lo, 2020). Content teachers expressed their opinion that language teachers are responsible to prepare students for content learning. This attitude was very different in case of the language teachers, who were generally more open for collaboration as they felt that only through collaboration with content teachers, such results could be accomplished.

Forms of professional development for CLIL teachers

The design of professional development programs has some influence on its effectiveness (Lo, 2020). The most used professional development formats for CLIL teachers are short term, intense workshops on various topics. They usually provide participants with some theoretical knowledge and practical teaching strategies. While they are not usually followed by on-sight follow up activities, teachers frequently discard the newly acquired knowledge when they do not find it useful, or when they were not given sufficient support in its implementation (Lo, 2020). More meaningful for CLIL teachers are the workshops, which are accompanied by on-sight support with the means of lesson observations as well as post-teaching discussions and reflections (Guskey, 2002; Short, 2013). Activities which provide

opportunities for teachers to co-plan lessons, implement, and debrief seem to bring better results (Cammarata & Haley, 2018). In a similar vein, Tedick and Zilmer (2018) put forward the characteristics of the assignments which support integration and content. According to them these assignments must have the following features: be meaningful, involve feedback, involve enactment, involve opportunities to practice, result in observable changes, involve collaboration, and include the opportunities for reflection.

Methodology and methods

Context and participants

This research was conducted by the University of Warsaw in cooperation with the Association of Bilingual Schools and Teachers “Bilinguis” and Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce and was a part of a larger study exploring the contexts of bilingual teaching in Poland. The first part of the study was conducted in 2018–2019 with the means of two questionnaires distributed to both the headmasters and bilingual teachers.

There were 198 study participants who filled out the survey – 60 headmasters and 138 bilingual teachers. 42 of the headmasters (70%) who participated in the survey were from well-established schools where bilingual education programs were part of the curriculum for at least 3 years. The schools they represented were mainly public high school and primary schools with bilingual programs in grades 7 and 8. Only five headmasters came from schools with bilingual programs starting in early primary grades. 76% of the schools carried rather small or medium size bilingual programs with up to five teachers. A small number of schools had more than 10 bilingual teachers. In the surveyed schools, bilingual instruction was offered in English, and also in German, French, and Spanish. The most common taught subjects bilingually were biology, history, geography, and mathematics. Less often taught subjects included chemistry and physics as well as social sciences.

More than half of the teacher participants had at least six years of teaching experience. The majority of these teachers worked in public schools in larger metropolitan areas. 14 teachers worked in private schools. 76 teachers worked in high schools and 62 teachers in primary schools, mainly teaching grades 7–8 according to the CLIL provision regulations from 2017. Only five teachers worked in early primary grades (1–3). The qualifications of the participating teachers were in agreement with the Ministerial requirements. They were either the graduates of language studies with master’s degree, who obtained the qualifications through additional postgraduate studies in the content areas, or they were content areas specialists with master’s

degree and with language certificates ranging from B1 to C2. The most common was teachers with B2 (35) and C1 (19) certification. In the sample there were also six teachers who held a PhD in the subject they were teaching.

Procedure and data collection

The research was conducted in the transitional moment when junior secondary schools were eliminated, and bilingual programs were moved to grades 7–8 of primary schools. The data came from the two online surveys designed for obtaining information about the contexts of bilingual teaching. It was sent to 158 bilingual schools listed in the Ministry of Education information center (SIO) in Poland. The survey included closed- and open-ended questions exploring various areas related to bilingual education. One survey was aimed at bilingual teachers and one survey was directed to school headmasters.

Findings

Bilingual teaching practices

When the participants were asked about the most prominent challenges of conducting bilingual lessons, teachers were divided into those who identified the students' lack of linguistic competences as the most serious difficulty in their everyday practice, and those who indicated the difficulty of the subject content to be the main challenge in their teaching. With bilingual teaching practices, the surveyed teachers reported that they spend most of their time finding ways to introduce the subject content in a way that would be adjusted to the students' actual language abilities (47%). They also mentioned problems of finding suitable teaching materials (31%). Content description and explanation were also the sources of difficulty (27%) as well as the students' lack of appropriate content terminology (16%). Bilingual teachers also pointed out the assessment as the area which was a challenging in their bilingual practice (14%).

Regarding the target language use, 57 of 138 teachers declared that they use L2 less than 50% of the time. 55 teachers indicated that the target language is used between 50–80% of their teaching time. 26 teachers use it between 90–100% of the class time. Teachers were also asked about the reasons behind their choice of language of instruction. Most of the teachers stated that the difficulty of the subject content was the primary reason for their switching back to L1 (83%). Other reasons mentioned by the teachers were students' weak language skills (73%), lack of teaching materials which were appropriate for the students' needs (30%), and the teachers' own insufficient language skills (17%).

Areas of professional development

Both headmasters and teachers felt that professional development is strongly needed by bilingual teachers. However, there were some discrepancies between the two groups of respondents in relation to which area needed a greater support. These differences could be observed in Figure 1. More than 90% of teachers confirmed willingness to participate in professional development. The area which seemed to be most desired by them involved developing skills in bilingual teaching methodology (72%), followed by enhancing language skills (47%) and finally developing knowledge and strategies in the subject content teaching skills (37%). Similarly, all of the headmasters emphasized the need for professional development of bilingual teachers. Their three main areas of concern were developing skills in bilingual teaching (92%), developing language skills (73%), and subject content teaching (68%). Interestingly, the headmasters felt a stronger need than the teachers to provide professional development in the area of subject content teaching.

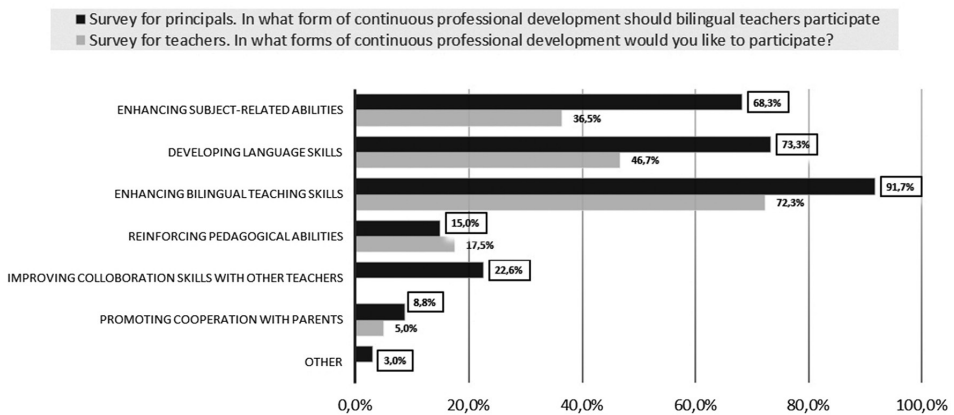


Figure 1. Perceived professional development needs by headmasters and bilingual teachers.

Both groups agreed that professional development opportunities for bilingual teachers are limited and should target the specific needs of bilingual teachers. In fact, bilingual school headmasters considered the opportunities for professional development as a significant factor in determining the success of bilingual education. 68 % of headmasters also supported the idea of required compulsory training preparing them for bilingual teaching. When asked for the justification of their answers, the headmasters who were in favor listed such arguments as the specificity of bilingual teaching strategies and methodology, the lack of bilingual training on preservice levels and the different role of language in bilingual teaching,

which requires special bilingual training. Training would make an easier start to working as a bilingual teacher. Those who were against compulsory training indicated that this would complicate the process of finding new teachers, that the initial qualification obtained at the university are quite sufficient, that practice is more is than sufficient and does not require any additional training, and the quality of the potential training.

Forms of professional development

When bilingual teachers were asked about the preferred forms of professional development activities, 69% of participating teachers declared workshops and short-term courses; 57% conferences and seminars; 55% online professional development sessions. 48% of teachers wanted to participate in study visits. Interestingly, only 17% of surveyed teachers wanted to participate in peer observation and the same number, 17% wanted to participate in action research. Only 10% wanted to participate in mentoring. Headmasters see the need for cooperating with other schools in the area of professional development. Teachers also listed the following types of training they participated in. These could be grouped in the following categories:

- General language teaching methodology workshops organized by language coursebook publishers,
- General CLIL courses organized and co-financed by Erasmus,
- Focused subject content CLIL workshops organized by PD organizations locally in Poland,
- Foreign language courses and private tutoring,
- Intercultural organized by cultural Institutes and embassies,
- Study visits in target countries,
- Qualification courses in the area of language studies,
- IB courses.

Discussion and conclusions

The study strongly indicated the need for professional development opportunities for bilingual teachers in Poland which would be centered on CLIL instruction. Both teachers and headmasters commented on several occasions about limited professional development initiatives in this area. A few teachers participated in some training sessions focused on CLIL teaching. These were mainly in a form of short and intensive CLIL training sessions offered abroad as part of the Erasmus exchange, without any follow-up support. Study participants also

mentioned taking part in some courses centered on their subject content topics, but they also were short-term. Research on teacher change shows that it frequently is a dynamic process depending on many factors. Of course, it cannot be assumed that participating in professional development will result in all teachers' change of beliefs and practices. It is therefore essential to build in more time and space in the professional development activities to support the process of change.

Similar to other countries, Polish CLIL teachers expressed their struggle to balance between the difficulty of the content and the students' language proficiency. They mentioned the limited content vocabulary in L2, which required from them additional teaching practice, but also observed that students have problems with the academic language needed to explain and describe the topics. Additionally, teachers spent much time preparing suitable teaching materials adjusted to the students' linguistic competence and the core curriculum. CLIL teachers also declared that the L2 use depends on the difficulty of subject content, the abilities of students, and also on their own language proficiency. The study also inquired about the most desired forms of professional development. Teachers chose short-term courses and workshops followed by the seminars and conferences as preferred. Many of them were also interested in participating in the study visits and being involved in online learning communities. It is also important to note which forms of professional development were not popular among the teachers as many of the disliked forms involved closer cooperation either with other teachers or other institutions, such as universities. Teachers were not keen on participating in peer observations, action research engagement, or mentoring.

These results should be interpreted in the context of the organizational realities of Polish bilingual education. The surveyed teachers work in isolation, more than 70% of teachers work in small or medium schools with up to five bilingual teachers. Frequently each of them represents a single subject. They also are the only teachers, i.e., they do not work in tandems (content and language subjects). The process of collaboration is not frequently settled in everyday work as the teachers have limited opportunities to collaborate with each other due to organizational hurdles and a lack of culture of collaboration.

In case of bilingual teaching, it has been established to be a valuable element. Bilingual teaching is known to help teachers become more aware of their students' needs. Content teachers might not know what the challenges students have regarding the language. Language teachers do not always know what kind of content students need to have. Bilingual teaching is also said to aid curriculum mapping and expand teachers' pedagogical foci. Through collaboration the language teacher can better understand the need for subject content language. Content teacher

can incorporate more language activities. Collaboration can enhance teachers' language awareness, ongoing evaluation, and development of the curriculum as well as changes in the curriculum.

Implications for professional development for CLIL teachers

Short term and intensive courses which are most desired by the teachers are helpful in addressing some basic information about CLIL or equipping them with some new strategies. However, research confirms that they should not be organized as standalone events but rather be accompanied by follow-up activities, such as observation sessions and opportunities for post teaching discussions. The follow-up sessions could be supported by the experts who organized the workshops. It is also important to mention that professional development initiatives should not only be organized for bilingual teachers, but also for language teachers to create more opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration. The follow up activities taking place in the school sights, could also aid in creating small learning-based communities addressing the specific needs of a particular school CLIL program.

In addition to the short-term intensive courses, research indicates that teachers should be involved in long-term professional development activities. These should have cross-curricular character, and address the three perspectives: the curricular, teacher beliefs, and classroom perspectives. They are shown to be specifically valuable since most bilingual teachers need to not only gain specific skills but also broaden their own beliefs about the integration of content and language. Therefore, providing them with such opportunities, creating the support, and motivating them to participate is necessary.

Collaboration should be the means and the central point of the professional development. Training should not only be encouraged but also become the content of the sessions as content and language teachers could be shown some technical aspects of collaboration. There are some available models how they may work together to design integrated curricula or develop teaching or assessment materials (Lo, 2020).

In addition, one of the characteristics of the Polish bilingual schools, is that it consists usually of a small number of bilingual sections/classes located in a school. In our sample, the majority of the surveyed schools (76%) has up to five teachers who provide instruction in various subjects. This fact that bilingual education is spread out among many schools, seems to naturally support the idea of creating opportunities for teachers from different programs/schools to cooperate.

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