



# **Primary and secondary school learners' perceptions of CLIL: a study in the Basque Autonomous Community**

**Clodagh Lopez Lavery**

Degree in English Studies

Department of English, German and Translation and Interpretation Studies

Supervisor: Nerea Villabona

Academic year: 2020-2021

## **Abstract**

Recently, there has been an increasing number of implementations of pedagogical approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in order to promote multilingualism. Apart from the analysis of learning outcomes and successful classroom practices in this approach, the examination of stakeholders' perceptions, specially of students, on how they perceive CLIL is of great interest. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight the importance of students' perceptions concerning their learning experience and process when learning through a foreign language. Through a questionnaire-based analysis carried out in two different schools in the province of Biscay, this study explores primary and secondary education students' perceptions of English and CLIL. The results revealed that no significant differences were found between the primary and secondary school students. In addition, the participants conveyed a positive feeling towards their CLIL experience, despite the low language competence of some students. Furthermore, the findings suggest that students' motivation and language proficiency are enhanced through this bilingual programme. In view of the responses obtained from the participants, the data presented in this paper may have a significant pedagogical value regarding the possible improvements of CLIL for the purpose of increasing students' motivation towards language learning.

Key words: CLIL, perceptions, students, motivation, multilingualism

## **Table of contents**

Abstract

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).....	2
2.1. What is CLIL? .....	2
2.2. The CLIL classroom .....	3
2.3. CLIL users .....	4
3. Perceptions of CLIL .....	6
3.1. Teachers and parents .....	6
3.2. Students' voices in CLIL settings .....	8
4. Multilingual education and CLIL in the BAC .....	10
5. The study .....	12
5.1. Participants .....	12
5.2. Instrument .....	13
5.3. Method .....	13
6. Results .....	14
7. Discussion.....	17
8. Conclusion .....	19
References .....	21
Appendix .....	25

## **1. Introduction**

The education system established in Europe of the last two decades has undergone a series of changes regarding innovative pedagogical techniques in order to promote multilingualism; thus, the appearance of bilingual programmes is becoming more apparent in most countries in Europe. Language learning and its acquisition play a significantly important role in our present society, given that it increases future career prospects and boosts internationalism, among other reasons. Moreover, in order to contribute to the development of a multicultural society, European citizens are strongly advised to be able to communicate in two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue. Therefore, in most countries throughout Europe, students begin to learn a foreign language at a considerably young age. For instance, a pedagogical approach that promotes bilingualism, or even multilingualism, and has been implemented across Europe is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Bearing this in mind, this paper is mainly divided into two sections. On the one hand, I will first of all provide information about the implementation of CLIL in order to have a theoretical background. For instance, the definition of CLIL, its main characteristic and pedagogical approaches, and the prevailing situations where foreign language learning occurs will be explained. Then, given that this thesis is based on students' perceptions of CLIL, a review of previous research concerning this topic will be presented, in terms of teachers', parents' and students' beliefs. Finally, before introducing the study, a brief summary of the history of multilingual education and CLIL in the Basque Autonomous Country (BAC) will be given.

On the other hand, the second part of this section will be focused on a study carried out in two different schools in the province of Biscay in which 133 students participated, the main objective being analysing their perceptions of CLIL through a questionnaire. On account of this, once the results obtained from the questionnaire are analysed, they will then be compared with previous research. Lastly, I will supply a reflection on the information gathered and explained throughout my paper, as well as from the outcomes attained from my study. In addition, the influence of students' perceptions and the importance of further research on this topic will be highlighted.

## **2. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**

### **2.1. What is CLIL?**

Nikula (2017) defined Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an educational approach which refers to the use of an additional language as the means of instruction in nonlanguage school subjects. Thus, CLIL is a bilingual programme that has a dual-focus aim: the learning of the content of a subject and the learning of a foreign language at the same time. Accordingly, the learner gains new knowledge about the material of the subject while learning and practicing the foreign language.

The term CLIL was coined in 1994 in Europe by David Marsh in order to help young students understand the importance of learning a new language and to develop a positive attitude towards language acquisition (“CLIL: An interview with Professor David Marsh”, 2009). This educational approach received political support from the European Union as a key element to reinforce multilingualism. Already in the 90s, the European Commission (1995), highlighted the necessity for every European citizen to acquire the ability to communicate in at least two community languages apart from their mother tongue. Therefore, in 2002 they established a plan to promote the learning of two foreign languages from a very early age in addition to their L1 in order to encourage the learning of languages and create a more language-friendly environment in Europe.

Considered an umbrella term for some, CLIL encompasses a wide range of models, which represent divergences regarding the age of implementation or the intensity of the exposure to the foreign language, among others; so, certain schools may teach subjects from the curriculum as part of a language course, while in other schools at least 50% of the curriculum is taught in the target language. This approach can be implemented both in school, starting from kindergarten, and in university degrees. Furthermore, it is important to mention that, English being a lingua franca, most CLIL programs use this language as the medium of instruction, although additional languages can be used. For instance, Dalton-Puffer (2011, pp.183-184) points out the typical features of CLIL programs in Europe as follows:

- CLIL uses a language that is not spoken in the society the students live in; thus, a lingua franca or a foreign language.
- English is the prevailing CLIL language, given that it is regarded as an essential literacy feature.

- CLIL teachers are normally content experts and non-native speakers of the target language.
- CLIL is more often implemented in secondary level, when students have acquired literacy skills in their L1.
- CLIL subjects are typically timetabled as content lessons; and the target language continues to be taught as a foreign language lesson.
- In CLIL programs, less than 50% of the curriculum is usually taught in the target language.

Thus, as typical foreign language lessons still remain together with the CLIL lessons, students' exposure to the target language increases.

## **2.2. The CLIL classroom**

As CLIL varies largely within different regions, there are diverse characteristics in each model and there is not a particular CLIL pedagogy; however, CLIL shares several common features that distinguishes this approach from other language teaching methods. By way of illustration, the 4C's Framework developed by Coyle (1999) has been the most common and successful educational methodology and guidance for planning CLIL lessons. She presents four main dimensions which are crucial for an efficient CLIL practice: content (subject matter), cognition (thinking skills), communication (using target language) and culture (intercultural awareness). Thus, the integration of these four attributes is what distinguishes CLIL lessons from standard language lessons. For instance, the learners progress in their knowledge of the content while acquiring linguistic skills by expressing their thoughts and interacting in the target language. By such means, the students will learn to develop information processing skills.

In addition, Cole et al. (2009, pp.14-15) have depicted the following key characteristics of CLIL practices deduced from their experience of working in primary and secondary schools:

- 1) Choosing appropriate content: lessons must incorporate relevant content which is suitable for the students' age, ability and interests.

- 2) Developing intercultural understanding: the students should learn the content through a distinct cultural lens, in order to understand global issues, to reflect on different traditions and values, and to develop citizenship.
- 3) Using a foreign language to learn: CLIL involves linguistic progression by exposing the learners to their target language. So, the pupils will work out the meaning of what they hear and read. Besides, they will ameliorate their understanding and literacy by virtue of code-switching.
- 4) Making meanings that matter: CLIL generates motivating situations for communication which persuade learners to use the foreign language as a means to interact with native speakers and to express their thoughts and feelings.
- 5) Progression: as well as their target language, learners will improve their knowledge of the content subject too. They will develop higher thinking skills along with creativity and independence while using the new language they have learned.

In addition to this, CLIL has certain general objectives and requirements; among others, the CLIL classroom is expected to enrich specific terminology and intercultural competence, enhance learners' language competence and to boost students' motivation to learn foreign languages (Lasagabaster, 2017). Having all these goals in mind, the implementation of CLIL programs is sometimes linked to active learning methodologies and the use of ICTs. For instance, Barrios and Milla-Lara (2018) claim that CLIL has undergone a series of changes, such as a shift in methodology and access to technologies, that have enhanced students' and teachers' motivation towards language learning and teaching.

### **2.3. CLIL users**

In the last two decades, learning a foreign language directly or learning content through the medium of a second language has become essential in most countries all over the world. This approving approach towards multilingualism is resulting in advanced educational and societal improvements. As a case in point, Cenoz and Ruiz de Zarobe (2015) distinguish between situations where foreign language learning occurs as a) speakers of minority or low status languages, b) speakers of languages that are not part of the host's country's curriculum due to population mobility, c) learners who are taught

content through the medium of a local minority language in order to improve their language skills, or d) speakers who are taught some subjects in an international language so as to ameliorate their job prospect.

During this century, globalization is the main cause of the ongoing societal changes, which is why learning a new language has become fundamental in European education systems. In CLIL or other immersion programmes, English has become the language of instruction; thus, in these pedagogical practices, importance is given to a lingua franca rather than a second language in the surrounding society (Nikula, 2017). Learning an international language is a key factor for cultural awareness and job opportunities.

When it comes to CLIL learners, there is an increasing concern on whether CLIL should be compulsory or optional for the students, given that the implementation of this pedagogical method may result in learners' heterogeneity and language competence disparity. As noted by Doiz and Lasagabaster (2017), "if CLIL is made optional, a self-selection process will more than likely happen, which will result in only the more gifted students taking advantage of the CLIL experience" (p. 3). Therefore, the bilingual classes would only be constituted by the most motivated and linguistically skilful and clever students. On account of this, it is most likely that academic gaps arise between the two groups, taking into consideration the exposure to the foreign language inside the school and the verbal intelligence of the students.

Research into CLIL has a long history and researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of this programme from different perspectives. Many studies have focused their attention on the outcomes of the approach's implementation, especially content and language outcomes (see Pérez Cañado, 2017). The process of CLIL implementation in the classroom has also been analysed through classroom practice observations and stakeholders' perspectives. In fact, as Bonnet (2012) explains:

From a research point of view, although analysing language learning outcomes is fundamental, exploring the participants' perspectives on how CLIL is implemented at an early age and the effects it has on them offers valuable insights on how learning outcomes might be interpreted (as cited in Pladevall-Ballester, 2015, p. 46).

Keeping this in mind, CLIL users' experiences and thoughts about their learning process in CLIL contexts constitute the main focus of this paper.

### **3. Perceptions of CLIL**

There is evidence that suggest that stakeholders' beliefs and attitudes play a crucial role when it comes to the successful implementation of language learning programmes, such as CLIL. In fact, according to Ruiz de Zarobe (2013), the positive attitudes towards multilingualism and foreign language learning are encouraging additional changes in society and education.

Thus, it is important to highlight that the consideration of stakeholders' and, especially, students' perceptions concerning language learning is key for the learners' successful acquisition of the L2. For instance, Lightbown and Spada (2006) explain how students are prone to be considerably more motivated when the pedagogical methods and strategy design used in class correspond to their beliefs in regard to how teaching should be executed. This suggests that positive attitudes are associated with effective learning and students' enthusiasm to keep learning.

This chapter is devoted to understand the significance and importance of the impact that stakeholders' attitudes and beliefs have on the process of language learning in CLIL. Therefore, teachers and parents' perceptions, as well as students' attitudes and beliefs will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **3.1. Teachers and parents**

In this section I will be analysing the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding their experience with CLIL, by generalising several researchers' studies. It is needless to mention that each CLIL implementation is different given that the context varies depending on the socio-cultural environment and educational policies of the country in which the approach is carried out (Coyle, 2008).

In respect to teachers, they play an important role in this language learning programme. In order for the implementation of CLIL to be successful, the teacher needs to be proficient in the target language of instruction, as well as competent and trained to teach the content of the subject. Along with this, educators are considered to be a primary source of motivation for the learners. Therefore, teachers' perceptions and posture are important as a means to illustrate which practices may be more successful in language teaching, considering that they are the ones who make the decisions in the classroom.

As a case in point, Pladevall-Ballester (2015) presents a study of students', teachers' and parents' perceptions on the implementation of CLIL in five primary schools in Catalonia. The answers of her questionnaire concluded that all 5 teachers agreed that their experience in CLIL was positive, seeing that, overall, their students' motivation and oral comprehension had increased. In response to the question concerning the potential benefits of CLIL, the educators pointed out that the students learned to express themselves in the target language unconsciously, as they paid more attention to the content than the language itself. However, as for the institutional support, the teachers confessed not having received much help from the content educators, along with lack of time and material to prepare the classes.

Alongside Pladevall-Ballester, in a case analysed by De Dios et al. (2020) in monolingual communities enrolled in bilingual education in Spain, the stakeholders believed that CLIL boosts student and teacher motivation; however, some teachers complained about the lack of student engagement in the classes. For instance, they showed concern towards their students' low level of English, and lack of materials and peer support too. Nevertheless, in general, the teachers felt satisfied with their experience in CLIL regardless the hard work and dedication it entailed.

In regard to parents' perceptions in Pladevall-Ballester's (2015) research, the vast majority of them were fond of their children doing CLIL, as they believed that learning English had a purpose for their future. Besides, they emphasised that it was more challenging for their children and, therefore, it motivated them more to learn the language. As a result, they learned to make greater efforts, which leads to the training of their cognitive skills, given that this incites them to search for new ways of studying. Aside from these benefits, some parents believed that CLIL is also advantageous for the

promotion of cultures, as the students learn to apply English to everyday issues. However, the parents that were not in favour of CLIL were convinced that the students needed to master the L2 before learning the content, given that those who struggled with English did not understand the teacher, and consequently, did not learn.

Nevertheless, at the end of her study, Pladevall-Ballester came to the conclusion that parents in general were overly illusive in relation to CLIL, as they thought that it was the key to solve their children's difficulties with the target language. As well as this, parents were certain that the main focus of CLIL lessons was the learning of the foreign language rather than the content; thus, they considered that the pedagogical approach should be implemented in less serious subjects to avoid losing content (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015). On the contrary, Dalton-Puffer (2011) points out that foreign language learning may not be the subject matter of CLIL, except for the teaching of specific terminology of certain topics. This may result in the teachers and parents thinking that the students will master the target language in EFL lessons; and consequently, CLIL educators will devote less time to the teaching of the language.

Overall, teachers' perceptions of foreign language learning and the importance of it may have an influence on how learners perceive their experience; therefore, it could determinate their motivation regarding language learning (Hüttner et al. 2013). Like so, students' perception of CLIL will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.2. Students' voices in CLIL settings**

In recent years, there has been a considerable number of students dropping out of school either due to lack of motivation or simply because the education system is not meant for them. However, teacher training programmes and the development of new pedagogical techniques may animate and encourage students to continue studying. For instance, when it comes to language learning, CLIL could be a remedy to prevent lack of motivation and anxiety towards a foreign language; since content is being taught while the students are both practising and interacting in the foreign language, and are being exposed to it unconsciously. As a matter of fact, according to Várkuti (2010), given that they can experiment and express themselves with the language, "using English as a

medium for learning various subjects is a more efficient route in providing functional language proficiency than traditional foreign language learning” (p. 67).

As a case in point, Doiz et al. (2014) and Lasagabaster (2017) have carried out two different studies in schools located in the Basque Autonomous Country concerning secondary education students’ reflection on their CLIL experience. With respect to the second research mentioned, two key words – *global* and *international* – were prominent when asked about the students’ perception of English; which is related to their answers given to how learning English could benefit them: for travelling and working. Similarly, these responses were also reported in the study by Doiz et al. (2014), together with the facility of communicating with people abroad. These findings are a clear demonstration of their motivation to learn a foreign language, seeing that learning English has a purpose for their future. As the learners get older, they begin to think about their future careers and, thus, become more aware of the importance of learning English. For instance, multilingualism and cultural awareness are two other factors that the students have taken into account in these studies.

In relation to the disadvantages of CLIL lessons, two main contrasting responses emerge. On the one hand, in Doiz et al. (2014)’s analysis, the students believe that studying a subject in a language other than their L1 is difficult, as they have to work harder and may not gain the full understanding of the teacher’s explanations. On the other hand, Lasagabaster (2017) concluded that if the content was more demanding, the students would need to work harder and may not be as keen with CLIL. Furthermore, foreign language classroom anxiety was another aspect that the learners pointed out; yet most of them felt secure in CLIL classes because of the exposure they had had to English over the years.

The difficulties some learners may have with English may bring to light the language competence differences in the classroom. For instance, both studies reveal the apparent concerns of those who struggle the most with the target language. The students who were more proficient reported that the lessons were more boring as a result of the rhythm of the classes being slowed down, given that teachers had to repeat their explanations in order to ensure every students’ comprehension. This divergence could be because of the

lack of interest or motivation towards the target language; and the attendance to extracurricular English lessons.

When it comes to measures to improve the learners' CLIL experience, the idea of having a native teacher giving the lessons was the most common answer. In a like manner, they also suggested taking part in exchange programmes. Both of these propositions would enhance the students' pronunciation and their knowledge about an English-speaking country's culture. Moreover, the proposal of boosting teamwork by doing group projects came up in the questionnaire carried out by Doiz et al. (2014), as this would diversify the range of activities and ameliorate the classroom atmosphere.

Furthermore, in a study carried out by Pladevall-Ballester (2015), where Catalanian students' global perceptions of CLIL and their feeling of self-improvement were analysed, similar outcomes were obtained. For instance, the learners found it useful to learn a foreign language while applying it to the content of the subject. In addition, most of them confessed their will to implement CLIL in other subjects in order to increase their hours of exposure to the foreign language. Concerning their difficulties, the students believed to struggle more in the field of production in comparison to comprehension, although they all perceived that their English level had improved. Overall, Pladevall-Ballester (2015) concluded that "CLIL is already perceived as a positive practice that promotes motivation, learning and interest in the foreign language" (p. 57). Additionally, similar findings are described in the study executed in the BAC by Doiz and Lasagabaster (2016). As a case in point, they came to the conclusion that due to the content becoming more demanding, students who are experiencing CLIL for the first time are less considered about the foreign language seeing that their language proficiency in English is increasing. In fact, the learners believe that their English language skills have improved as a result of the CLIL classes in contrast to the regular English lessons.

Taken together, these results provide important insights into how CLIL lessons can progress and become better in order to boost the learners' motivation, given that students are prone to be involved and show more interest when they face new activities or new teaching approaches that they enjoy and that benefit them. For instance, the positive beliefs of students regarding CLIL is a crucial factor to ensure its success, as this

pedagogical approach “fulfils some of the demands of their mindsets, such as new technologies, access to mobility, and global communication” (Pérez-Vidal, 2013, p. 76).

#### **4. Multilingual education and CLIL in the BAC**

The Basque Autonomous Country (BAC) is a region located in the north of Spain, in which the official and predominant languages are Basque and Spanish. The Basque education system involves three different linguistic models: A (instruction is entirely in Spanish with Basque as a compulsory subject), B (partly in Basque, partly in Spanish) and D (entirely in Basque with Spanish as a compulsory subject). However, the vast majority of students are educated in Basque, given that according to the Basque Government, 67% of the school population up to university level represent model D students (Eustat, 2020).

As noted by Merino et al. (2015), because of the success that multilingual educational approaches have had throughout Europe, new trilingual programmes have started to become apparent in the BAC since the late 1990s. For instance, in 1991 and before the implementation of CLIL, a project named *Eleanitz* was carried out throughout schools in the Basque Country which imposed the learning of English at the age of four (Ikastolen Elkartea, n.d.). Along with this, other projects (Early Start to English, INEBI, BHINEBI) have been carried out in order to encourage multilingualism. In such programmes, both Basque and Spanish are the language of instruction of content together with a foreign language, which is usually English. Thus, English is considered to be the L3 of most of the students in this bilingual community. The aim of the implementation of these pedagogical programmes is to enhance the learning of English in order to improve the level of proficiency and promote multilingualism.

According to the Basque Government’s plan on improving the education system in the BAC (2019), the main objective of the programme carried out between 2016-2020 was to promote multilingualism in schools. In order to enhance English teaching, CLIL was encouraged to be put into practice in secondary education. For instance, as for 2018, the implementation of this pedagogical approach had increased by 10% and the learning of at least one subject through a foreign language had been carried out in 158 schools throughout the BAC.

Nevertheless, even though the promotion of multilingualism is one of the main concerns in most European countries, the improvement of language competences of the Basque language is the main priority of the Basque Government's plan (2019). As Basque is considered a minority language, sociolinguistic circumstances can have an impact on the promotion of this language. For this reason, Basque being a minority language, some people might consider CLIL or English a threat and an invading language, given that it decreases the students' exposure to other languages, in this case to Basque, and the space of the Basque language in the curriculum.

## **5. The study**

### **5.1. Participants**

The participants of the present study are Basque-Spanish bilingual students of primary and secondary education from two different schools in the province of Biscay: Durango and Lekeitio. They are immersed in linguistic model D; therefore, the language of instruction of the school subjects is Basque, except for the Spanish and English language courses. Furthermore, CLIL has also been implemented in both schools, given that the students from Durango's school learn science in English; and those from Lekeitio, music and physical education.

Participants were divided into two groups in terms of age and school year. On the one hand, learners attending 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> (13-15 years old) year of secondary education; and on the other hand, 6<sup>th</sup> year (11-12 years old) of primary education. Concerning the first group mentioned, the list of participants sums up to 77 students and includes both learners from Durango and Lekeitio; whereas the second group only consists of 56 students from Durango.

With regard to the secondary students in the study, the vast majority of the students (52) considered to have an intermediate level of English; while 20 and 5 of them believed to be advanced and beginners, respectively. 44% (34) of the learners started learning English at the age of 5 or 6, and the majority of them (49) attend English lessons as an extracurricular activity. When it comes to CLIL, nearly all of the students, except for 6,

were familiar with this pedagogical approach, given that it was not their first time learning a school subject through English.

In relation to the primary school students, again, the majority of the learners (32) reckoned that their English level was intermediate; whereas 22 of them considered to be beginners and only 2, advanced. The difference in age and experience may be a demonstration of the lower level of English of certain students, in comparison to the first group. As to when they started learning English, slightly more than half of them (29) began at the age of 3; and 80% of the learners attend English academies. Besides, all of the students started learning science through English in 4<sup>th</sup> year (LH 4); therefore, they had experience in CLIL.

## **5.2. Instrument**

The data that will be analysed in this paper was collected by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that includes students' perceptions of CLIL in three different parts: background questions, the main questionnaire and open questions. The questionnaire was self-constructed, but included topics covered in previous research studies that have analysed students' perceptions of CLIL (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015; Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2017).

Firstly, students were asked to answer background questions concerning general information about themselves and data on the subject of their relationship with English. Secondly, they were asked to agree or disagree with statements by rating them on a scale from 1 to 5 (5 being the point they agreed with the most) using the Likert scale. This survey was divided into 4 main sections. In the first one, general opinions about the CLIL approach were included; in the second one, motivation and their feeling of improvement were analysed; in the third one, their difficulties when learning through English were taken into consideration; and in the last one, the students were asked about their perceptions of L1 and L2 with respect to CLIL. Finally, 5 open questions were asked in order to obtain more information about students' likes and dislikes of studying through English; along with questions in relation to how they would improve their experience with CLIL, its advantages/disadvantages and the importance of learning in English.

### **5.3. Method**

Due to the current situation because of the global pandemic, a message with the questionnaire assigned to it was sent to the schools via email. The decision of sending an email with the information rather than giving explanations at the school in person was made in order to avoid direct contact with external people. Firstly, investigation was done using the internet so as to verify whether the schools implement CLIL or not. Once confirmed, I sent an email to the CLIL teachers soliciting their help to accomplish the aim of my study.

The questionnaire was designed by using GoogleForms and the participants, who were volunteers and were aware of the anonymity of it, completed it in 10 to 15 minutes during class time. The students had the chance to answer the questions in English or Basque, so as to avoid confusion. Furthermore, they were given written instructions above the questions to clarify what they were asked to do. For instance, a definition of CLIL was attached to the questionnaire, and a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was used in order for the students to agree or disagree with certain statements. The different points of the scale were defined as followed: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

## **6. Results**

In this section, the overall perceptions of learners will be explored together with a comparison between the results obtained from the primary education and secondary education students' perceptions. First of all, their responses to their global view of English and CLIL will be shown; secondly, motivation and their feeling of improvement; thirdly, their beliefs on difficulties; and fourthly, their perceptions of L1 and L2 will be presented. These responses were attained by the students' use of the Linkert scale; however, their answers to open questions will also be shown at the end of this section.

The first set of statements was aimed at gathering students' global perceptions of English and CLIL. Overall, their reaction to the statements were positive. The vast majority of students, both from primary (71%) and secondary education (64%), coincided with their belief of English being an easy language to study. Besides, the most striking positive result to emerge from these statements is the one concerning the usefulness of

English for the learners' future, given that 89% of the students from primary and 77% from secondary strongly agreed with this point. However, when asked about whether they would learn another school subject in English, 35% of the older students disagreed and 42% presented an unbiased view (point 3 of the scale); while 57% of the younger students reported their willingness to increase their hours of exposure to CLIL.

In the next section of the questionnaire, respondents were required to indicate their feeling of improvement in terms of reading, listening, writing and speaking skills. Overall, the students considered that their language proficiency in English had increased since they started learning content through the foreign language. Similar results were reported in both groups, taking into account that, on average, 75% of the learners believed to have improved the skills mentioned above. Although no significant difference was found between their self-perceived feeling of improvement regarding the skills mentioned above, the ratings concerning the reading competence and richness of vocabulary were a little higher. Nevertheless, slightly more negative reactions were found in regard to secondary students' motivation to study through CLIL, as 32% of them indicated a neutral opinion about this. Interestingly, there was also a major difference in the ratings when asked about how confident the learners felt when participating in class. For instance, in comparison to their ratings of the remaining statements in this section, the 'disagree' rate among primary education students was slightly higher (16%) in that which concerns their self-confidence in the classroom.

Similar findings were obtained from both groups with respect to the challenges the students face in their CLIL lessons. The results of this section did not show any particular difficulty that the learners could encounter. Surprisingly, no differences were found among their perception concerning the struggle to read, speak and write in English, given that the vast majority of the participants (approximately 37/56 and 52/77) either strongly disagreed or simply disagreed with these statements. In addition, 41% of primary and 35% of secondary students strongly disagreed with the fact that they find it difficult to understand their teacher speaking in English. Contrary to expectations, one unanticipated finding was that, even though the students did not seem to present any apparent difficulties in the CLIL classes, 38% of the secondary education students neither agreed nor disagreed and 41% of primary students agreed with the next statement: "studying a school subject in a foreign language is hard".

In the last statement rating section, the participants were asked about their view regarding the relation between English and the language they are usually instructed in, which is Basque. Given that the results were considerably straightforward, no significant difference between the two groups was evident. The vast majority of students from primary (67%) and secondary (64%) education strongly disagreed with the thought of studying through English being dangerous or harmful for Basque. Given the fact that some teachers tend to switch to their mother tongue in order to give clear explanations or to tell their students off, a couple of questions were asked concerning this aspect. For instance, roughly 55% of the students from both ages indicated a stronger agreement towards being keen on the fact that teachers use Basque to explain certain things. Yet, a counterintuitive response was obtained in a similar statement. Interestingly, around 33% of the students took a rather neutral stance in the following statement: “I think the CLIL teacher should never use Basque or Spanish in CLIL”.

Finally, the students were voluntarily inquired to state their feelings and perceptions through open questions; to do so, they could write as much as they wanted in an answer box. The first question intended to ask what they liked most from the CLIL classes, to which a key word stood out among primary students: *projects*. However, responses related to language proficiency, mostly *speaking activities*, were more prominent between the older students, given that they seemed to like to practice their English in CLIL lessons. For instance, one of the participants stated: “we learn more words than in regular English lessons; so, our English vocabulary expands” (Student 69). On the contrary, the learners’ overall response to what they disliked from the lessons was studying for exams and not understanding certain words. Besides, some of the students from secondary appeared to be struggling to understand the content, given that it is more difficult to learn in a foreign language. Similar findings were obtained regarding the advantages and disadvantages of learning through English. Overall, the students believed that CLIL is an effective method to improve their English; nevertheless, they found it more challenging, and several of them were preoccupied of not knowing how to explain the content in Basque. Besides, a certain number of the participants were aware of the fact that those who were less proficient in English tended to get bored.

The vast majority of primary students reported that they would not improve anything from the CLIL lessons. However, a few participants underlined the need of practicing English outside the classroom in order to enhance their language proficiency. Regarding secondary students' responses to how they would improve these lessons, two key terms could be highlighted: *having the opportunity of studying abroad* and *watching videos*. Moreover, a couple of interesting answers were given to this question. For instance, some students believed that having a native teacher and using a wide range of activities would improve their CLIL experience. Lastly, when asked about their perception of the importance of CLIL, all of the students were aware of the significance of English for their future, given that learning through English prepares them for living or travelling abroad. Moreover, they believed that CLIL is a different and more dynamic method to improve their English. Some students from secondary education stated that, nowadays, knowing English is crucial in order to acquire a job in the future, as well as to have cultural awareness.

## **7. Discussion**

In this section, the answers obtained from the present study will be discussed by comparing them to previous research carried out concerning students' perceptions of CLIL. On the whole, the students conveyed positive feelings and perceptions towards their experience in CLIL, as it is portrayed in Pladevall-Ballester (2015) and Doiz and Lasagabaster's (2016) studies, for example.

Firstly, it was observed that the students were highly motivated to study content through English, given that the vast majority of them believed that English was a rather easy language to study and useful for their future. Thus, having this ambition encourages them to keep learning. This finding was also reported by Doiz et al. (2014), since learners consider that their CLIL experience is beneficial for language improvement and career prospects. Furthermore, the difference between primary and secondary students' willingness to study another subject through English could be due to the content becoming more demanding as they move forward in school years.

With respect to the participants' feeling of improvement in their level of English, these results reflect those of Doiz and Lasagabaster (2016) who also found that more than

half of the students were convinced of having improved their English skills more than in their English language classes in terms of reading, listening, speaking and writing. A possible explanation for this might be that CLIL students acquire the foreign language unconsciously by applying, in this case, English to real subjects. Thus, they put the language into practice through the learning of the content. As for the lower rates concerning self-confidence when participating in class, Doiz and Lasagabaster (2016) state that “students tend to be less participative as they climb the educational ladder (adolescence usually becomes a demotivating factor) and, second, as the difficulty of content increases in the higher courses, participation tends to be negatively affected” (p. 123), which could be related to classroom anxiety.

Nonetheless, the results obtained from the statements concerning students’ difficulties and challenges did not show any significant differences between the groups, given that the students appeared to be unaffected by the ability to understand their teacher speaking in English and to put English into practice. However, the statement related to the difficulty of speaking in English in CLIL was slightly higher than the remaining points. In accordance with the present results, previous studies, like the one executed by Pladevall-Ballester (2015), have demonstrated that although most students did not seem to have difficulties with English in general, learners appeared to struggle more in production than in comprehension aspects. For instance, students admitted having had problems when speaking in English. The observed outcome may be attributed to teachers’ lack of attention to oral skills, as students are usually assessed by means of written examinations rather than oral presentations. Besides, this may be related to learner’s tendency to switch to their mother tongue when speaking to their classmates and even when addressing the teacher in CLIL lessons.

Regarding the students’ perceptions of L1 and L2 in CLIL lessons, the fact that the participants seemed to appreciate when teachers used Basque or Spanish in the classes might be a demonstration of the lack of a strict language policy in CLIL classes. The results from this section match those obtained in Lasagabaster’s (2017) study, given that the learners believed that the use of Basque or Spanish in certain moments was beneficial for them in order to gain the full understanding of the teacher’s instruction, seeing that the teachers switched to Basque as a last resort. However, this may have a negative effect,

as, seeing that nobody stops them, students could get used to speaking in their mother tongue and, thus, students' production skills would not be developed.

Lastly, it is encouraging to compare the responses obtained from the open questions with those found by Lasagabaster (2017) and Doiz et al. (2014), bearing in mind that they are truly similar. For instance, students from this second study also reported that what they enjoyed most from the CLIL lessons was doing projects, given that it promotes teamwork. As for the disadvantages of CLIL, the responses given brought to light class homogeneity, as those who were not proficient in English struggled to keep up with their classmates; consequently, the pace of the lesson was slowed down, which was prone to cause boredom and lack of motivation among the more competent students. Regarding the students' perceptions of the possible improvement of CLIL lessons, as well as in Lasagabaster's (2017) study, the learners expressed their will to have native teacher or to study abroad. These answers are likely to be related to the students' desire to improve their pronunciation and experience a language and culture immersion in an English-speaking country. In addition, English learners may find themselves to be more engaged and interested when being familiarized with a native speaker's language and culture. By and large, the majority of the participants were motivated to continue learning through English, seeing that they believed it was important for their future careers and for travelling abroad. This suggests that young learners are aware of the impact that languages have in the labour market, as well as the importance of internationalization and multilingualism, given that nowadays English is essential for communicating with foreigners. In other words, because of the present social demand for English proficiency, students are more conscious about the relevance of English in their future, which may result in motivation to study the language.

## **8. Conclusion**

This paper has contributed to demonstrate that how students perceive their experience in CLIL has an impact on their learning process and the ways this pedagogical approach can be improved in order procure the successful implementation of such programs. Taken together, the results of this study suggest that the CLIL classroom is an optimal context to enhance students' motivation and language proficiency, given that the learners tend to acquire the foreign language unconsciously while gaining knowledge about the content

through the variety of activities used in this innovative bilingual programme. For instance, the changes concerning active methodological advancements and the use of technology seem to increase CLIL students' encouragement towards language learning.

Furthermore, this thesis has also led us to fully comprehend the concept of CLIL and how learners perceive an improvement in their language skills in this setting. Additionally, as the present study is set in the BAC, the current language and multilingual context of this community was taken into account. That being so, the importance of acquiring language competence and promoting multilingualism has been highlighted throughout the paper, considering that we are witnessing how European countries are starting to implement bilingual pedagogical programmes, such as CLIL, in schools.

Nevertheless, even though the outcomes of my study confirmed those found by previous research studies, I am fully aware of the limitations of my research. In other words, my case only concerns students' perceptions from a small area in Biscay; therefore, results may vary depending on the multilingual context of the area and the pupils' language competence. Given this circumstance, comparing the results obtained from this paper with teachers' perceptions of CLIL would be a fruitful topic for further investigation, as little attention has been paid to stakeholders' needs to implement a successful pedagogical practice, and the problems they face in their daily lessons. Despite its limitations, this study has shown the overall positive ideas students hold in CLIL settings and the effectiveness of this implementation, given that the participants have reported their willingness to continue learning through English.

## References

- Barrios, E. & Milla-Lara, M.D. (2018). CLIL methodology, materials and resources, and assessment in a monolingual context: an analysis of stakeholders' perceptions in Andalusia. *Language Learning Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1544269>
- Cenoz, J. & Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2015). Learning through a second or additional language: content-based instruction and CLIL in the twenty-first century. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28 (1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2014.1000921>
- CLIL: An interview with Professor David Marsh. (2009). *IH Journal of Education and Development*, (26). <http://ihjournal.com/content-and-language-integrated-learning>
- Coyle, D. (1999). Theory and planning for effective classrooms: Supporting students in content and language integrated learning contexts. In J. Masih (Eds.), *Learning through a Foreign Language: Models, Methods and Outcomes* (pp. 46–62). CILT.
- Coyle, D. (2008). CLIL - A pedagogical approach from the European perspective. In N. Van Dusen-Scholl, & N.H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 97-111). Springer.
- Coyle, D., Holmes, B., & King, L. (2009). *Towards an Integrated Curriculum – CLIL National Statements and Guidelines*. The Languages Company.  
<http://www.rachelhawkes.com/PandT/CLIL/CLILnationalstatementandguidelines.pdf>
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2011). Content-and-language integrated learning: From practice to principles? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 182-204.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000092>
- Doiz, A., Lasagabaster, D. & Sierra, J.M. (2014). Giving voice to the students: What (de)motivates them in CLIL classes? In A. Doiz, D.Lasagabaster & J.M. Sierra (Eds.), *Motivation and Foreign Language Learning: From theory to practice* (pp. 117-138). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Doiz, A. & Lasagabaster, D. (2017). Management teams and teaching staff: do they share the same beliefs about obligatory CLIL programmes and the use of the L1? *Language and Education*, 31(2), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2017.1290102>
- Ikastolen Elkartea (n.d.). Eleanitz Project English. [https://eleanitz.org/public/eleanitz\\_project\\_english](https://eleanitz.org/public/eleanitz_project_english)
- European Commission. (1995). *White paper on education and training. Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society*. European Commission.
- European Commission. (2004). *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: An action plan 2004–06*. European Commission.
- Eusko Jaurlaritz (2019). *EAEko Hezkuntza-sistema Hobetzeko Plana*. [https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/inn\\_heziberri\\_hobekuntza\\_plana/eu\\_def/adjuntos/hobekuntza\\_plana\\_2016\\_2018.pdf](https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/inn_heziberri_hobekuntza_plana/eu_def/adjuntos/hobekuntza_plana_2016_2018.pdf)
- Eustat (2020). *Unibertsitatetik kanpoko araubide orokorreko irakaskuntzetan matrikulatutako ikasleak, Euskal AEn, lurralde eta irakaskuntza-mailaren arabera, zentroaren titulartasunari eta hizkuntza ereduari jarraiki*. Euskal Estatistika Erakundea. [https://eu.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0002400/ti\\_alumnado-matriculado-en-enseanzas-de-regimen-general-no-universitarias-en-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-territorio-historico-y-nivel-de-enseanza-segun-titularidad-del-centro-y-modelo-linguistico-avance-de-datos-2020-2021/tbl0002427\\_e.html](https://eu.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0002400/ti_alumnado-matriculado-en-enseanzas-de-regimen-general-no-universitarias-en-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-territorio-historico-y-nivel-de-enseanza-segun-titularidad-del-centro-y-modelo-linguistico-avance-de-datos-2020-2021/tbl0002427_e.html)
- Gardner, R.C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.
- Hüttner, H., Dalton-Puffer, C., & Smit, U. (2013). The power of beliefs: Lay theories and their influence on the implementation of CLIL programmes. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 16(3), 267-284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.777385>

- Lasagabaster, D. & Doiz, A. (2016). CLIL students' perceptions of their language learning process: delving into self-perceived improvement and instructional preferences. *Language Awareness*, 25(1), 110-126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2015.1122019>
- Lasagabaster, D. (2017). Integrating content and foreign language learning: What do CLIL students believe? *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 5 (1), 4-29. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.5.1.011as>
- Lightbown, P.M & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.
- Merino, J.A. & Lasagabaster, D. (2015). CLIL as a way to multilingualism. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1128386>
- Nikula, T. (2016). CLIL: A European approach to bilingual education. In N. Van Deusen-Scholl & S. May (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education: Second and Foreign Language Education* (pp. 111-124). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02246-8\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02246-8_10)
- Pladevall-Ballester, E. (2015). Exploring primary school CLIL perceptions in Catalonia: students', teachers' and parents' opinions and expectations. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 18(1), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.874972>
- Pérez-Vidal, C. (2013). Perspectives and lessons from the challenge of CLIL experiences. In C. Abello-Contesse, P. Chandler, M. D. López-Jiménez & R. Chacón-Beltrán (Eds.), *Bilingual and multilingual education in the 21st century: Building on experience* (pp. 59-82). Multilingual Matters.
- Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2013). CLIL implementation: from policy-makers to individual initiatives. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 16(3), 231-243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.777383>

Várkuti, A. (2010). Linguistic benefits of the CLIL approach: Measuring linguistic competences. *International CLIL Research Journal*, 1(3), 67-79.

## **Appendix A**

### CLIL questionnaire

Hello! I'm a final year student of English Studies at the UPV/EHU and I'm working on my final year project (TFG). My TFG covers the beliefs and perceptions of students who are involved in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Therefore, I would like you to answer the following questions in order to collect your opinions. The questionnaire is divided into four main sections, your answers are completely anonymous and it will only take you 10 minutes to complete it. If you have any questions, you can ask me or my tutor (nerea.villabona@ehu.eus).

Thank you for your help!

#### **General information:**

1. Gender
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Non-binary
2. Age
3. School
4. Which linguistic model do you study in?
  - a. Model A
  - b. Model B
  - c. Model D
  - d. Other
5. School year
6. What level of English do you have?
  - a. Beginner
  - b. Intermediate
  - c. Advanced
7. Which subject do you study through English?
8. Is this subject compulsory?
9. How old were you when you started learning English?
10. Do you take English lessons as an extracurricular activity?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. Is this your first time learning a school subject through English?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please rank the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

**Global perceptions of English and CLIL**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. English is an easy language to study                                | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I like English  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I enjoy learning [CLIL subject] in English.                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I think that learning [CLIL subject] promotes language development. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I think that studying English is useful for my future.              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I would learn another school subject in English.                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Motivation and feeling of improvement**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. I feel like my English has improved since I've started learning [CLIL subject].                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I feel like my reading skills have improved / I understand texts better now                           | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I feel like my listening skills have improved / I understand the listenings and my teacher better now | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I feel like my writing skills have improved / I think I write texts easier now                        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I feel like my speaking skills have improved / my pronunciation is better now                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 6. I feel like I know more vocabulary in English |           |
| 7. I feel confident when I participate in class. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I am motivated to study this subject.         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
|  | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Difficulties and challenges**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Studying a school subject in a foreign language is hard.        |           |
| 2. I find it difficult to understand my teacher(s) talk in English |           |
| 3. I find it difficult to read in English (in CLIL)                | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I find it difficult to speak English (in CLIL)                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I find it difficult to write in English (in CLIL)               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
|  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
|  | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Perceptions about L1, L2**

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. I think studying through English is dangerous/harmful for Basque/Spanish | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I think the CLIL teacher should never use Basque or Spanish in CLIL.     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I like it when the teacher uses Basque/Spanish to explain certain things | 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Open questions**

1. What do you like most about CLIL lessons?
2. What do you dislike about CLIL lessons?
3. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of studying subjects in English?
4. How would you improve this subject taught through English?
5. Do you think CLIL is important? If so, why?