PrimA-CLIL: Multiple Stakeholders' Perceptions of CLIL and its Implementation at the Primary School Level in Austria.

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Abstract

One of the latest approaches in the field of English Language Teaching is CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning. The success of CLIL projects depend largely on the attitudes and reactions of the stakeholders involved. In order to examine the perceptions of the major stakeholders involved in the implementation of a CLIL project at a primary school in Austria, a mixed methods study was conducted, employing focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and questionnaires in a sequential manner. The findings from this study suggest that children enjoy their English/CLIL lessons and hold largely positive attitudes towards English. Moreover, for the parents, English at the primary school level seems to be important and the students do not appear to be overburdened with CLIL. None of the stakeholders perceived any disadvantages about the CLIL concept, but they did mention specific concerns about its actual implementation at this particular school.

Keywords: CLIL, Austria, primary school, stakeholder, perceptions

1   Introduction[1]

Enormous changes in language education have resulted in the development of many new teaching approaches since the 1970s. One of the latest acronyms to join the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) is CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning. CLIL is "related to all forms of education in which subjects are learned through L2 [second language] or through two languages simultaneously" (Ball, Kelly & Clegg, 2015, p. 1). The CLIL concept, used throughout the world, is an approach that continues to gain popularity.

In Austria, since 1983, foreign language education has been a compulsory part of the Austrian national curriculum for primary school students in years 3 and 4 and, since 1998, this has been also the case at key stage I. Austria's current primary school curriculum, implemented in 2003, suggests that teaching English is meant to happen in a content-embedded and cross-curricular way in each Austrian primary school classroom. Furthermore, the curriculum[2] declares that the process of teaching a foreign language has to occur through all subjects (except German), such as science, music, physical education, art, and mathematics, without reducing learning opportunities.

> Foreign language learning at stage one of primary school should be integrated into the primary school curriculum in short phases [...][and] take place through compulsory subjects such as general knowledge, music, physical education, art and maths, without reducing the educational content.
>
> *Dem Wesen des Unterrichts in der Grundschule entsprechend, erfolgt das Lernen der Fremdsprache auf der Grundstufe I als integrierter Bestandteil des Grundschulunterrichts in kürzeren Einheiten, [...] Die*

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[1] The article bases on my PhD Thesis.
[2] BGBl. Nr. 134/1963 in der Fassung BGBl. II Nr. 303/2012 vom 13. September 2012

> *Vermittlung der Fremdsprache erfolgt im Rahmen der Pflichtgegenstände wie Sachunterricht, Musikerziehung, Bewegung und Sport, Bildnerische Erziehung und Mathematik, ohne dass es zu einer Kürzung des Bildungsangebots kommt. (MoE, 2005, p.246)*

One could interpret that all content work in key stage I should be taught through a foreign language in all subjects except German. The CLIL concept, therefore, would be appropriate to fulfil these requirements.

Generally, "[…] language is seen not only as a tool for communication, but as a key focus for the development of thinking, identity and personal growth" (Flemming, 2010, p. 3). The Council of Europe and Commission wrote that confronting young learners at the primary school level with a foreign language is one of the eight key competences for students and that learning two languages at a young age is an important part of basic competences (e.g., COM, 2009). As globalisation increases, challenges for education and foreign language learning also rise. CLIL, which may be able to address said challenges, can already be found in educational programmes that promote the use of minority and environmental languages in a range of settings reaching from primary (e.g., Buchholz et al., 2007; Egger & Lechner, 2012; etc.) to secondary (e.g., Dalton-Puffer et al., 2008; Gierlinger, 2007; etc.) to tertiary (e.g., Bicaku, 2002; Vazquez & Gaustad, 2013, etc.) education.

If CLIL is implemented, it can have an impact on the entire school. The success of CLIL projects depend largely on the attitudes and reactions of stakeholders involved such as teachers, principals and, of course, the pupils themselves. Whilst the perspectives of CLIL stakeholders at the tertiary and secondary school levels have been partially researched (e.g., Alonso, Grisalena & Campo, 2008; Leyva & Diaz, 2012; etc.), only limited research

on the perspectives of primary school stakeholders has occurred (e.g., Egger et al., 2012; Massler, 2012; Yassin, Mark, Tek & Yin, 2009). Such research at the primary level would be vital for generating insights into factors that are important for the successful implementation of CLIL. Primary school stakeholders' perceptions of CLIL have been discussed frequently in literature over recent years, predominantly regarding teachers and students (Dirks, 2004; Massler, 2012; Meyer, 2003; Viebrock, 2007; Wegner, 2012). Meyer (2003) looked at how learners accept CLIL, whereas Dirks (2004) and Viebrock (2007) observed teachers' points of view, while Wegner (2012) researched teachers' and students' viewpoints. Massler (2012) explored more than two groups of stakeholders' (students, teachers and parents) perceptions of CLIL at the primary school level in Germany (Breidbach & Viebrock, 2012, p. 12). Although these studies – especially Massler's, which functioned as a basis for this paper – can lend valuable information to this study, there remains a general lack of research on multiple stakeholders' perceptions of CLIL over the long term. Some of the studies mentioned above (Massler, 2012; Meyer, 2003; Wegner, 2012) show that CLIL may have a positive impact on stakeholders, although it is not evident what principals think about the project, why CLIL was implemented, and any intentions behind its execution. Moreover, Meyer (2003) and Wegner (2012) only looked at certain age groups (years 3 and 4) with studies carried out over a short period of time – mainly one to two years. Furthermore, Massler (2012) and Meyer (2003) only included individual students, but not all of the pupils involved.

The current lack of and limitations to research on CLIL among primary school stakeholders proves the importance of this study. Consequently, the

effects of all active participants involved – students, teachers, principals, parents and a local expert – have been researched to generate insights into successful implementation of CLIL at this level and to get a more accurate view of CLIL's effects. Moreover, to minimise the flood of random CLIL applications, this study intends to observe the various perceptions of stakeholders involved after four years at a primary school to learn what worked and what did not regarding CLIL implementation, how students were affected, and how to rejuvenate the project for another four years. An additional goal of the study was to discover stakeholders' wants, needs, beliefs and attitudes related to CLIL to develop interconnected thinking in an effort to advance the programme based on the following research questions:

1. How do the key stakeholders perceive the implementation of CLIL at their particular primary school?

2. Which advantages and disadvantages do the stakeholders perceive with respect to their ongoing CLIL project?

3. How are the stakeholders' perceptions about the aforementioned aspects different or similar?

2   Methodology

2.1   Research background

Multiple participants affiliated with the school (students, parents, an expert, teachers and principals) were involved in this study. These participants were the most actively involved stakeholders connected to the school and class that used CLIL. Their perspectives on CLIL implementation and their perceived advantages and disadvantages supplied the main information for

this thesis. The conscious selection of one CLIL class with a small total number of participants (N=37) allowed for in-depth information to be derived (see Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of stakeholders.

Students	migratory background	family languages	Teachers	native	non-native	Parents	Principals	Expert
16	2	Serbian (2x)	3	1	2	15	2	1

The participants were all connected with a primary school in an Austrian city centre. The school had 146 students as of January 2015 and the typical intake of the school included students from the inner city and surrounding north and south districts. The specific CLIL model in this school was created through a grassroots initiative, in which one class teacher in the school did not have a required specialisation and a native speaker was able to work more hours in the school. With the help of a University College professor (the expert in this study) who had worked with CLIL during her career, a programme was established in 2011 with 20 pupils, one class teacher and one CLIL teacher. Through this initiative, the school expanded and offered up to eight classes, although only one CLIL class was offered. The professor who initiated the

project retired two years after its implementation and the class teacher who began the project passed away during the first week of the students' third year in the programme. Therefore, the entire project had to be reformed and refined multiple times. By 2015, four years after the initial implementation, CLIL was used in different subjects up to six hours per week to educate 19 students via the English language. In year 4, the CLIL lessons were taught with the help of the CLIL teacher, who attended CLIL workshops, ESL courses and special CLIL-focused in-service education and training sessions (INSET). During CLIL lessons, the class teacher served as a support teacher or observed, but always stayed in the classroom while the CLIL teacher led the instruction. In collaboration with the class teacher, the CLIL teacher planned the topics, time, exposure and subjects. In this case, the class teacher and CLIL teacher selected topics together that utilised the foreign language for pre-determined lessons and subjects. The intention, however, was to include English in a variety of subjects such as physical education, music, mathematics, science and art. Choices about what subjects to teach via CLIL were up to the teachers, who could be flexible each week regarding the subjects in which the six hours were allocated.

2.2   Research Design

2.2.1 Data Collection

This study used an embedded single-case design with multiple units of analysis (stakeholders) and occurred in a pedagogical context (CLIL class). It holistically analysed certain components of people's perceptions in depth (Häder, 2010, pp. 350-352) to better understand the nature of the CLIL class.

Based on the study's research questions and the availability of different participants, the researcher had to employ different ways to collect information, which led to using a mixture of methods involved (i.e., mixed methods research) (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Punch, 2009). This study's objective of using qualitative (one-on-one interviews and focus groups) and quantitative methods (questionnaires) aimed to incorporate the best of both approaches and to minimise individual shortcomings (O'Leary, 2010, p. 127) (see Figure 1). Its goals were to develop multiple perspectives on one problem by triangulating and complementing methods in order "[t]o obtain different but complementary data on the same topic" (Morse, 1991, p. 122). This survey utilised a question-driven perspective that equally valued qualitative and quantitative data (O'Leary, 2010, pp. 128-129). Thus, integrating the information while combining and embedding qualitative and quantitative data helped to answer the research questions of this study more comprehensively.
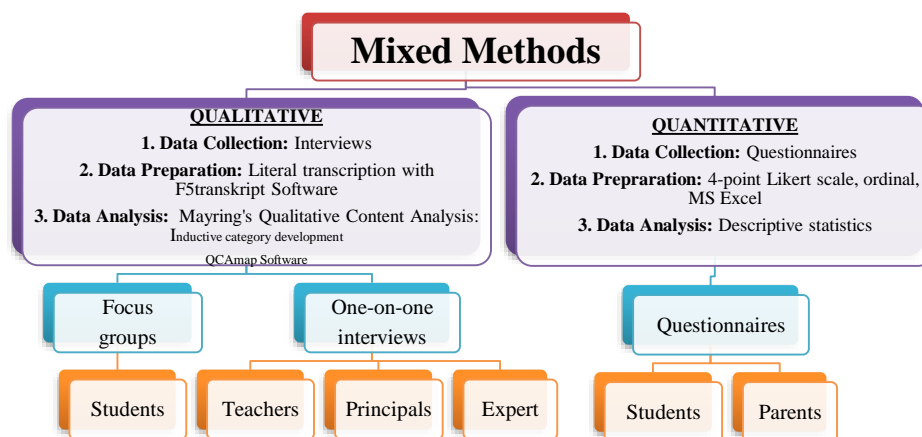

Figure 1. Outline of methods and participants.

In this study's sequential design, one data collection method deliberately followed another (see Figure 2). To produce more insight, information

obtained from earlier research rounds was embedded into future data collection tools to address the questions on different levels and overcome weaknesses. This complemented the strengths of one method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 416) with the primacy to action-orientation for a better representation of multiple interests (Cameron, 2009, p. 144).

As Figure 2 shows, the sequence began with the expert (Step 1), who had the initial idea of bringing CLIL to this particular school. Interviews with the teachers (Step 2) and students (Steps 3 & 4) followed, as they were the most actively involved groups of stakeholders. The principals (Step 5) were the next closest involved group in the school environment, followed by the parents, who experienced CLIL more passively (Step 6). Before carrying out the interviews, guided questions for each group were developed in advance. However, after each step, individual tools were adapted based on information and findings from previous ones in effort to link insights from one tool with the others.
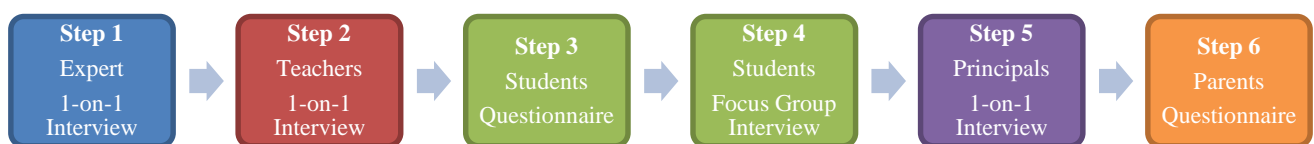

Figure 2. Sequential design of the study.

2.2.2   Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed through qualitative content analysis using inductive category formation with the help of QCAmap software, in which quantitative analysis was carried out through univariate analysis represented through characteristic numbers, tables and figures using Microsoft Excel.

3   Results

3.1 Perceptions of CLIL implementation at this particular primary school

The majority of children (14 of 16) enjoyed their English lessons (*StsQ_Qu9*)[3] and most parents (13 of 15) believed that pupils were not overburdened with English in other subjects. Moreover, English at the primary school level seemed to be an important aspect for the majority of parents (14 of 15). Whereas the majority of parents (60%), the expert and principals would like to have more English for the children, the pupils themselves (11 of 16) would not like to have more English in school, although are fine with the way it is offered (*FGI5_ L3_#00:11:05-0# I am okay with it.*). At the same time, however, students did not want to learn only in German (13 of 16), and the parents did not want this for their children either (*ParQ_Qu5*). Furthermore, parents were not fully satisfied with English (CLIL) in their child's class and felt that they did not receive enough information about CLIL regularly (*ParQ9_Qu24: Seeing videos or information about their children's knowledge; ParQ4_Qu17b: Not enough information on CLIL or progress reports from CLIL teacher.*). Additionally, students' English self-assessments varied based on individual experiences and issues. They mainly gave positive feedback on what English means to them, however, their feelings seemed to be strongly connected to the content and subjects taught through English. The majority of students (13 of 16) liked music and art taught through English (*FGI3_L4_#00:05:04-0# I like art the most and music.*) but did not enjoy physical education (10 of 16) and mathematics (12 of 16) (*FGI2_L2_#00:06:35-0# Because the music is so*

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[3] Following notations have been used: ExI: Expert Interview, TsI: Teachers Interview, StsQ: Students Questionnaire, FGI: Focus Group Interview, ParQ: Parents Questionnaire.

much nicer and matches better than in German.). Parents, teachers, principals and the expert believed it was important for pupils to be in contact with other languages and learn in a two-fold way, i.e., by learning content and language simultaneously. Those involved named language sensitivity and language awareness in listening and pronunciation, no fear to talk in a second language and the usage of English in forthcoming secondary schools as potential issues.

3.2   Perceived advantages and disadvantages

All parents (15 of 15) saw an advantage in CLIL, and felt the main advantages were in its flexibility of foreign language use (13), simultaneous learning of content and a foreign language (12) and an increased intensity of English taught (8) (*ParQ_Qu21-22*). Whereas some parents (7) did not feel that their children have advantages over children in other classes (*ParQ10_Qu20a: Each class has a certain focus, which has to be equally valued.*), teachers, the expert, principals and the children did (FGI5_L3_#00:11:30-6# (…) *One learns a lot of English, more than in other classes.).* In general, the parents (15 of 15), principals (2 of 2), teachers (3 of 3) and the expert could not find any disadvantages about the CLIL concept with regards to the pupils' outcomes, but teachers noted they have to put a lot of effort into preparation (*TsI2_#00:39:23-0# (…) and that I think is a big effort .. and this big preparation effort is the biggest disadvantage, I do not think that the children have a disadvantage.).* Additionally, all teachers, 13 of 15 parents, the expert and principals all felt CLIL improved quality within the school (*ExI_#00:09:34-4# Yes, basically I am positive that such an offer*

is a quality improvement for a school (…)). However, frequent staff changes, discontinuity and a lack of recorded content over the years were perceived negatively. The parents were also unhappy about some aspects of the implementation, which was different from what was promised, such as the reduction of weekly instruction hours due to the class splitting (*ParQ5_Qu17a: Does not correlate with the information that the parents received in advance*.). Principal 1 even indicated that a combination of class teacher and CLIL teacher might hinder the spontaneity of English involvement throughout the day and that the focus on one class delays development within the rest of the school (PrinI1_#00:06:21-7# *(…) The idea has always fascinated me – using content that is fascinating to children – so that these are also used in another language (…). I have seen there, that .. that interesting content, is a super way to take a foreign language in (…). But what I saw .. is the fact that with two teachers (…) the spontaneity was less prevalent (…).* In addition, participants offered various desires: The parents would have liked to have six hours of English instruction spread throughout the week rather than just over two days, wished that a native-English-speaking CLIL teacher was hired and wanted more information about the programme and actual children's foreign language knowledge to be provided (ParQ7_Qu24: *Write tests, give homework, write parent letters about what was learned.)*. Teachers would like to have more material, such as books, glossaries, etc., to accompany the Austrian primary school curriculum as well as collaboration with a partner class and afternoon care. According to the principals, the CLIL class should increase its visibility and consider opening its classroom doors. At the same time, teachers would like more

support from the principal who, they hoped, would consistently develop and encourage new CLIL teachers while showing appreciation of and commitment to the programme by starting a CLIL class each year (*ExI_#00:15:46-3# (...) for me, the most important is that the principal stands for it, thus she/he really has to stand for it so that this really works out, she/he really has to carry this outwards and support the teachers massively. (...)*).

4   Conclusion

Based on the theoretical and empricial abridgment of this study, implications for utilising CLIL in Austrian primary schools and developing CLIL teacher training in Austria can be examined.

The fact that each of the teachers in the study had a different individual viewpoint on the CLIL concept revealed that CLIL does not have one unique description and comes in a wide range of shapes and sizes specific to localised conditions (e.g., Coyle, 2013; Sasajima, 2013). However, the flexibility can create confusion and stretch the umbrella of CLIL too much (Ioannou Georgiou, 2012), irritating teachers with a variety of CLIL models (Costa & D'Angelo, 2011). Still, CLIL teaching can allow a teacher to have flexibility without unifying principles and achieve specific goals that fit the individual environment of a classroom or school. In the school discussed in this study, CLIL was utilised differently depending on the teacher. Whereas teacher 1 focused on conceptual work more, teacher 3 stressed the 4Cs more and believed the cultural aspect of CLIL was an important pillar. This circumstance has extensive implications for practice: There is no silver bullet for teaching CLIL.

Moreover, it is important to clarify what CLIL at the primary school level and within one's particular primary school is and how it differs from other approaches. As discussed in this study, confusion and misunderstandings can occur if colleagues and principals do not have enough knowledge about CLIL. In this study, stakeholders' expectations mainly focused on CLIL's language considerations (including language awareness, language comprehension and increased vocabulary) but not on knowledge gains. As Austrian primary school teachers have the autonomy to decide on classroom content as long as it fits within the framework of the curriculum, the themes, length and quality of instruction of foreign languages vary widely based on the school and region (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Eurydice, 2006) as no clear guidelines and frameworks exist. Thus, principles of CLIL, individual CLIL programmes and clear boundaries that define the loose term of CLIL must be established to minimise misunderstandings and the flood of so-called CLIL programmes. Nationwide regulation that would, for example, only allow trained CLIL teachers to start CLIL classes and extend approval for implementing CLIL programmes would mark the first step towards maximising CLIL's value, help in minimising random applications without enough knowledge of the concept and give a clear overview of which CLIL programmes exist under which conditions.

Furthermore, because all parents mentioned that they did not receive enough information, it would be beneficial to communicate original ideas and develop collaborative, interconnected thinking to sustain the programme and allow up to ten years to see the effects of its development (Clegg, 2009, pp. 29-31). Additionally, the programme requires committed individuals and an

action plan (What? Who? With whom? When?) in which aims are clearly stated (Heyworth, 2003, p. 38) and regular meetings are held (Sutch et al., 2008, p. 12) to make the programme's procedure transparent and outline its step-by-step implementation (Iby & Radnitzky, 2014, pp. 24-26). Therefore, teachers, principals, an external specialist (expert) and parents representing themselves and their children met to discuss their individual wishes, wants and needs for the upcoming years – distinguishing between short- (year 1), medium- (year 2-4) and long-term (year 5-8) goals – in an attempt to construct the school's own theory of practice and create individual classroom and school measures, displayed in an action plan (not displayed here due to lack of space, but please contact the author for further information).

In addition, frequent teacher changes and discontinuity of content was seen as a major problem for various stakeholders in this study. Teachers, however, should be flexible in implementing a foreign language via CLIL throughout the day or week so that students can be immersed without sacrificing valuable time and are able to use the foreign language in multiple, diverse subjects (Felberbauer & Seebauer, 1994, pp. 10-11). The reality of primary school teacher education in Austria often makes it difficult to fulfil these requirements as teachers are trained generalists with foreign language learning playing a minimal role. Primary school teachers' own English competence improvement is not foreseen (Millonig, 2015, p. 232) and it is not the responsibility of the University Colleges to determine how English-language instruction in primary schools takes place (ibid., p. 219). However, teacher input is important (Ellis, 1997; Lee & Van Patten, 2003; Long, 1996); if teachers' skills are low, student outcome will not be optimal (Millonig,

2015, p. 230). Therefore, teachers need to be motivated to attend certified education programmes, remain enthusiastic in the classroom despite varying levels of support and develop cooperation and networks nationally and internationally to support each other, share techniques and spread ideas.

Additionally, model schools should be encouraged to provide teacher trainees with the opportunity to experience CLIL in action to assess its real-world applicability. Consequently, in-service and pre-service CLIL training sessions need to be offered to prepare teachers with additional skills in foreign language didactics, CLIL methodology, target language acquisition and subject competences (suggested by many researchers such as Ball et al., 2015; COM, 2009; Egger & Lechner, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Hillyard, 2011; Millonig, 2015). In other words, educational policies should focus on providing support to schools and pilot projects to develop and implement CLIL, while prioritising training teachers in CLIL matters (Hillyard, 2011).

Based on this study, further CLIL research could be beneficial to multiple stakeholders. Studies the explore a possible coupling of CLIL with progressive pedagogies such as Jenaplan, the development of an in-depth survey about pre- and in-service CLIL courses and the exploration of CLIL teachers' wellbeing could yield findings that help advance the subject, improve implemenetation and increase understanding of the topic.

5 Summary

All in all, with Austrian primary schools returning to a topic-based curriculum, the CLIL concept has a stronger rationale than ever before but still needs clear, replicable guidelines. Through the evaluation of multiple

stakeholders' perceptions, an action plan for further development has been created to follow a sequence of individual steps to help a particular programme be successfully implemented. Over the short-, medium- and long-term, the project might be institutionalised and shared with other schools to develop collaboration and increase foreign language learning across primary schools in Austria.

6   References

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