An investigation into the perspectives of Irish primary school teachers on the use of the Content and Language and Integrated Learning approach for teaching Irish.

Marino Institute of Education

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Declaration

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Abstract

The teaching of Irish in primary schools and the best ways in which to do so is a highly discussed topic within the Irish education system. There are varying opinions and attitudes towards the teaching of Irish. The new Primary Language curriculum was introduced in 2015 which encourages an integrated and active approach to language teaching for English and Irish. In 2019, the Content and Language Integrated Learning pilot programme was introduced by the Department of Education and Skills in 2019. For these reasons, new and integrated approaches to teaching Irish have become topical within the Irish education system. The researcher chose to focus on examining teachers' perspectives on using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teach Irish and investigating whether the CLIL approach was an effective method of language teaching in the experiences of chosen participants. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a number of participants who had varying experiences of using the CLIL method. These experiences and perspectives were then analysed and related to existing literature in the findings chapter of the study. Recommendations for future implementation of CLIL in Irish primary schools are made in the Conclusion chapter of the study.

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List of Figures and Abbreviations

CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

PLC – Primary Language Curriculum

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Introduction

Overview

This chapter deals with the background and rationale showing why the researcher chose to carry out research in the area of teachers' perspectives on the use of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. This section will also briefly explain the reasoning behind the change in the original aim of the research which occurred due to school closures and Covid-19 restrictions. The research will then be contextualised within the Irish education system. Following this, the key objectives and aims of the study will be identified. Finally, the structure of the study will be outlined.

Background and rationale

In Irish primary schools, the topic of teaching Irish and the best ways in which to do so is a highly discussed and sometimes controversial topic. In recent years, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach has been discussed and introduced as a methodology for teaching Irish. The CLIL approach is 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). Though the CLIL approach has been used in Europe and internationally for many years for language teaching, it is still relatively new in Ireland. There is little research surrounding the experiences of those who have used the approach. It is for this reason that the researcher chose to focus mainly on the perspectives of teachers who have used the CLIL approach to teach Irish and content.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) introduced a pilot scheme for the use of CLIL in Irish schools in 2019. Originally, the researcher planned take a case study approach focusing on the perspectives of teachers in one of the pilot schools. However, due to COVID-

19 restrictions and the school closures in 2020 and 2021, the DES had put a hold on the programme. Therefore, the pilot school in question was unable to implement the programme in their school.

Due to these changes, the focus of the research shifted to general perspectives of teachers who have used the CLIL approach and those involved the creation of CLIL programmes and resources, about the effectiveness of CLIL for teaching Irish, looking at a number of different contexts. Participants ranged from teachers who had been involved in an official pilot programme, teachers who had implemented the CLIL approach on a short-term basis on school placement, teachers who had implemented the CLIL approach in an informal capacity and those involved in creating resources for the use of CLIL for teaching Irish and content. These varying contexts provided rich perspectives and enabled the researcher to gain insight into a number of different approaches that can be taken when using CLIL to teach Irish.

Context

The CLIL programme was officially introduced in 2019 as part of the 20 Year strategy for the Irish language. The main aim of the programme was to improve learners' confidence and attitudes towards Irish in early education settings, primary and post primary schools (DES, 2019b). However, the CLIL approach had been used internationally for many years. Therefore, there are Irish teachers and researchers who had been involved in using this approach for teaching Irish prior to the introduction of the official pilot programme (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní Mhaoill, 2018. Ní Chróinín, Ní Mhurchú & Ó Ceallaigh, 2016). Furthermore, the Primary Language Curriculum introduced in 2015, promotes an integrated approach to language teaching and encourages the use of CLIL as a methodology for teaching Irish (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2015). As the Irish primary school curriculum is so packed, there are tight time constraints involved. Irish is allocated 3.5

hours per week in the curriculum, meaning children do not have much time to use and acquire the language in school. CLIL may be seen by some as an integrated solution to this challenge. Furthermore, the success of early immersion programmes in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools sets a rationale for methods such as CLIL to be used more widely in Irish schools.

Aims of the Research

The aims of the research are to gain a deeper insight into the perspectives of teachers who have experienced using the CLIL approach to teach Irish in a variety of contexts as well as looking at the perspectives of those involved in creating CLIL specific programmes and resources. Through this insight, the researcher hopes to be able to gain and present a detailed understanding of varying CLIL approaches that are being used in Irish primary schools. The researcher also hopes to gain an understanding around the challenges involved in using such an approach, especially while the CLIL approach is still in the early stages in Ireland, and how these challenges may be overcome. Lastly, the researcher hopes to be able to make possible recommendations for future implementation of CLIL in Irish primary schools based on the experiences and perspectives of participants in this study.

Structure

The study will be presented in five chapters. The first chapter; the introduction, will introduce the study. Chapter two; the literature review, will deal with the literature that is available around CLIL in both Irish and International contexts, as well as looking at some literature around the status of the Irish language and attitudes towards Irish in Ireland. Chapter three; the methodology chapter, will outline the procedures carried out for data collection and data analysis. Chapter four will present and discuss the findings of the study. Finally, chapter five will draw final conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Positionality

The researcher has an undergraduate background in languages, including Irish. The researcher was educated in a Gaelscoil setting for primary school and has spent time in the Gaeltacht at second and third level. Furthermore, the researcher has lived in Belgium and France both as an adult and as a child and therefore has an interest in language learning in general. The researcher will make every effort to ensure that her background in languages, particularly in Irish, does not affect the outcome of the study. This will be done by being open to all opinions and perspectives whether positive or negative, and committing to interpreting and presenting data as accurately as possible.

Literature Review

CLIL: Background and justification for use

The Content and Language Integrated Learning method or CLIL is 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 et al., 2010, p.1). The idea behind this approach is to teach subject content through the target language for the learners to experience an immersive approach to the language. The focus is not on grammatical structures of the target language. However, there is an element of language teaching with every lesson as well as teaching content (NCCA, 2019). There is an emphasis on the learners communicating through the target language as much as possible as the approach is influenced by the constructivist learning theories of Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner (Coyle et al., 2010). This is an approach that began to emerge in the 1990s in Europe, which has grown particularly rapidly in countries such as Finland and Spain (Pérez Cañado, 2012). Multilingual societies,

and therefore, multilingual education, have been around for many decades. It is said that the CLIL approach was largely influenced by immersion programmes in parts of North America, particularly in Canada in the mid-20th century (Pérez Cañado, 2012). In this example, English speaking parents in the French speaking region of Quebec wanted their children to have a high level of French. The solution that arose was to educate the children through French in other subjects such as Maths and Geography. English speaking children were educated in these subjects in the same classes as French speaking children. This approach to bilingual education became known as immersion (Hanesová, 2015). As news of this approach arrived in Europe, teachers and educators began trying similar methods for language teaching and learning. David Marsh, who was working in the area of multilingualism in a Finnish university introduced the term CLIL in 1994 (Hanesová, 2015). Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) list the driving forces of CLIL under two main categories: reactive reasons and proactive reasons. Reactive reasons for the use of CLIL are seen in the changing dynamics of classrooms in Europe. There are an increasing number of children in classrooms who are not confident in the language of instruction as it is not their first language. In these cases, CLIL methodologies can be of huge benefit to such children. (Coyle et al., 2010). Proactive reasons include growing globalization and the increasing need for multilingualism in today's society. Some of the major driving forces in this case are listed as:

- Families wanting their children to have some competence in at least one foreign language.
- Governments wanting to improve languages education for socio- economic advantage.
- The European Commission wanting to lay foundation for greater inclusion and economic strength.

- At the education level: language experts seeing the potential of further integrating languages education with that of other subjects (Coyle et al., 2010, p.8).

Since its emergence in the 1990's, CLIL has grown rapidly as a method of language teaching and learning across Europe and across the world. There are multiple studies and papers available detailing the experiences of putting CLIL theory into practice in a number of different contexts. As this study is investigating teachers' perspectives about the CLIL programme, this section will focus mainly on literature surrounding teachers' perspectives about putting CLIL theory into practice.

CLIL in the European context:

There is a large amount of literature available on CLIL in the European context. This section will focus on literature looking at teachers' perspectives on, and experiences of the approach.

Breidbach & Medina-Suarez's study looked at the attitudes of CLIL and non-CLIL teachers in Spain and Germany on CLIL and the use of drama games. The teacher responses showed mixed feelings towards the approach and its aims (Breidbach & Medina-Suarez, 2016). The teachers interviewed in the study included; content teachers who use some English to teach their content, English teachers who used some content to teach the language as well as trained CLIL teachers. Some felt that language was the most important factor in the teaching and content was simply used as a vehicle for language learning (Breidbach & Medina-Suarez, 2016). Whereas, others felt that the content was more important and that the language was a secondary aspect of the teaching. It is noted that finding the balance between content and language learning remains a topic of debate among CLIL teachers. The study concludes that though the CLIL approach is used widely across Europe, the importance of individual teacher identities and different local contexts must not be overlooked when looking at the CLIL

approach as a whole. These factors play a big role in whether a teacher/school will prioritise language over content or vice versa. (Breidbach & Medina-Suarez, 2016).

A study conducted in Finland focused on teacher's perspectives on materials and resources available to them when using the CLIL approach. In this context, CLIL was being used to teach English as a second language. Teachers in this study found it difficult to find suitable and adequate resources for their teaching. For example, they needed geography books about Finnish geography, in English. However, most English geography books available to them were about British geography. This impacted the quality of the teaching and learning of the content as there are not sufficient resources in the target language (Bovellan, 2014).

Both the issues of balancing content and language learning and suitable materials are addressed in an Italian study on experienced CLIL teachers (Infante, Benvenuto &Lastrucci, 2008). This study looks at the perspectives of Italian primary school teachers who have long-term experience using the CLIL approach to teach English. An area of disagreement that emerged from questionnaire responses is that problems such as finding suitable resources and striking the right balance between content learning and language learning were more prominent in their earlier years of using the approach. With experience, a majority of the teachers responded that they were able to find suitable solutions to these issues (Infante et al, 2008). Various studies show different results, meaning that more research is needed in this area. However, a number of respondents in this study stated that they felt that CLIL did not only have linguistic benefits but also cognitive benefits:

A teacher from Piedmont asserted that "CLIL activates both cognitive processes and a specific language that can't be framed in a sequential syllabus.(...) I believe that it is essential to analyse first the cognitive dimension of the target content in order to activate personalized teaching methods which may favour different cognitive styles and individual learning

strategies. Secondly it is necessary to analyse the linguistic aspects of the content"

(Infante et al, 2008, p. 159).

Collaboration between colleagues also emerged as a factor that, in the teachers' opinions, is essential for the successful implementation of CLIL. It is contended that when teachers are not supported by their colleagues, teaching using CLIL can be extremely difficult and lonely. Some teachers also noted that the lack of support from colleagues may be due to the increased workload as a result of CLIL or lack of confidence in their knowledge in the area (Infante et al, 2008).

Current state of the Irish language in Ireland and teachers' perspectives of teaching Irish:

The 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language (2010-2030) came about when research showed that the Gaeltacht could decline completely by the year 2025. It was clear that action needed to be taken in relation to the Irish language. (Oireachtas Library and Research Service [OLRS] 2016). The main objectives of the strategy are to increase the numbers of daily Irish speakers to 250,000, to increase the numbers of daily speakers in the Gaeltacht by 25%, to provide more support to Gaeltacht communities, and to increase the use of Irish in public services (DES, 2013). The Irish language holds a high official status in the country. It is the national and first official language of the country according to the constitution (Article 8.1, 1937). It has also been an official working language of the EU since 2007 (European Commission, 2019). In addition to the high official status, there is a good level of public support for and interest in the language, shown in the findings of some surveys. In a 2013 survey on attitudes towards the Irish language 67% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland felt positive towards the language. Only 1% in the Republic felt that Irish should be disregarded completely. (Darmody & Daly, 2015). However, the language's official status and the public interest in the language is not reflected in the numbers of Irish speakers in the

country. According to the Central Statistics Office's (CSO) numbers from the 2016 census; 39.8% of the population could speak Irish. Considering the fact that Irish is a compulsory subject throughout primary and second level education, this number is quite low. The number of daily and weekly speakers is even lower. There was only 73,803 people that indicated that they spoke Irish daily outside the education system (CSO, 2016). Darmody & Daly's (2015) analysis of various studies shows that attitudes towards Irish in primary and post primary English-medium schools is quite negative. Studies show that pupils do not see Irish as very useful and do not find it very interesting (Darmody & Daly, 2015). Conversely, there are studies that show positive attitudes towards Irish among primary school pupils attending Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools. 46% of pupils from Irish-medium schools and 39% of children in Gaeltacht schools reported to 'always like' Irish, in contrast to the 21% in English-medium schools. This suggests that a wider exposure to the language fosters a positive attitude to the language in learners. This provides rationale for further research to be undertaken around using CLIL methods in English-medium schools. However, as Darmody & Daly (2015) point out, the positive attitudes of pupils in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools is also likely influenced by parents and the home environment. Those who chose to send their children to Irish-medium or Gaeltacht schools likely have a positive attitude towards the language themselves.

Teachers' attitudes towards Irish were not reported on in Darmody & Daly's study. However, CSO census figures indicate that 7.8% of primary and preschool teachers spoke Irish daily outside the education system and only 4.4.% spoke Irish weekly outside the education system. This asks some searching questions in relation to teachers' attitudes towards engaging with the Irish language outside what is required of them within their profession. Dunne's (2019) study on pre-service teachers' experiences in preparing to teach Irish indicates that a majority of Irish pre-service teachers who participated in the study felt

that teaching Irish is an important part of their role as a teacher. An even larger majority of those surveyed felt that the primary teacher has an extremely important role in the promotion and revitalisation of Irish (Dunne, 2019). The study also finds that some teachers feel that too much emphasis is placed on the role of teachers in promoting Irish and that parents and other associations should play a bigger role. Over half of the respondents found the expectation of teaching other subjects through Irish 'very reasonable' or 'reasonable'. These mixed views among pre-service teachers show that there is a need for further research into the perspectives of teachers who are participating in using the CLIL approach to teach Irish. It should be highlighted that increased confidence and high proficiency in the language does not always lead to greater success in classroom practices:

Teachers reporting high proficiency are no more likely to have actually implemented CLIL practices or to use informal Irish in a communicative way (than less proficient teachers)…Teachers with higher proficiency are not immune to the challenges in teaching Irish that are reported by the rest of the group. They too report challenges in teaching completely through Irish in English-medium schools, and in nurturing positive attitudes to Irish amongst children (Dunne, 2019, p. 38).

The findings of this study indicate that even with a high level of Irish themselves, teachers may still struggle to teach Irish and to foster enthusiasm for the language in the children they teach using approaches such as CLIL.

Harris et al. (2006) reports on teachers' attitudes and practices of teaching Irish. The figures shown in this study show some discrepancies between teachers' attitudes, proficiency and satisfaction derived from teaching Irish. There are also noticeable differences between figures for teachers in English-medium schools and those in Irish-medium or Gaeltacht schools. For example, of English-medium schools surveyed, many pupils had teachers whose attitudes

towards Irish were either favourable (36.2%) or very favourable (51.4%), while only 5% had teachers that were unfavourable or very unfavourable. In comparison, there was no pupils in Irish-medium schools or Gaeltacht schools that had teachers who were unfavourable towards Irish (Harris et al., 2006). 24.8% of pupils surveyed in English-medium schools were taught by teachers who classed themselves as a 'weak second language speaker'. Whereas, in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, all pupils had teachers who classed themselves as a 'fluent second language speaker' or better. Again, these figures suggest that more exposure to the language has an effect on the confidence, proficiency and satisfaction of teachers.

CLIL in the Irish context:

The CLIL programme or the 'Foghlaim Comháite Ábhar agus Teanga' (FCÁT) as it is called in Irish, was officially introduced by the Minister of Education (at the time) Joe McHugh in 2019. A number of English-medium, early-childhood education settings, primary and post primary schools around the country were chosen for a three-year pilot of the programme (DES, 2019a). In a document released by the DES inviting English-medium schools to apply to take part in the pilot programme of FCÁT, the main aim of the programme was listed as: "Is í aidhm an tionscadail FCÁT ná cumas, muinín agus meon an fhoghlaimeora i leith na Gaeilge a fheabhsú i suíomhanna luathbhlianta i scoileanna Béarla, agus i mbunscoileanna agus in iarbhunscoileanna" (DES, 2019b, p.4). This initiative was introduced as part of the 20-year strategy, to improve attitudes towards Irish and to increase the number of daily speakers (DES, 2013).

In a document detailing the aims of the programme, the NCCA recommends an 'inter-language' approach for both pupils and teachers, especially in the beginning. The idea behind this is that pupils and teachers would use a mix of English and Irish during CLIL lessons so that pupils do not develop a negative attitude towards Irish by being over-corrected.

Additionally, it is important that teachers do not develop a negative attitude towards teaching Irish using the CLIL approach by feeling too much pressure from it (NCCA, 2019). This suggestion from the NCCA is in line with the findings of the previously mentioned Dunne (2019) study on pre-service teachers' opinions about the teaching of Irish. However, immersion-language education has been used in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools for many years in Ireland. It is evidenced that an immersive approach is an extremely effective way to foster fluency in a language. A 2015 report outlined evidence from various international contexts in which immersive language approaches are used successfully to teach minority languages. This is the approach used in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools in Ireland in which English is not taught for the first two years to allow for full target language acquisition (Ó Dhuibhir, Ní Chauig, Ní Thuairisg, Ó Brolcháin. 2015). Therefore, it may be suggested that using an inter-language approach when beginning to use the CLIL method may be beneficial but that it should move towards a more immersive approach for effective language acquisition to take place.

The CLIL approach is also encouraged in the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC). The PLC takes an integrated approach to language learning in general, the objectives for both languages (English and Irish) follow the same structure and links are shown in the curriculum showing possible opportunities for integration. The curriculum also encourages more of a focus on cognitive and communicative methods toward teaching and learning of languages (Dunne, 2020). This emphasis on communication and active participation in the language lends itself to CLIL methods. CLIL may also be seen by some as an integrated solution to the challenges of the time constraints of the packed curriculum, with Irish having only a 3.5 hour weekly allocation within the curriculum. The CLIL approach is suggested as a methodology in the curriculum. Particular importance is placed on the teachers' confidence in the language: "An important consideration in this regard is the teacher's confidence and

proficiency in the language. Teachers may begin their planning by choosing a subject in which they are comfortable communicating through Irish and that lends itself to CLIL" (NCCA, 2015, p. 41). Yet, choosing a subject that both lends itself to CLIL methods and that a teacher is comfortable teaching through Irish may be quite challenging for some teachers, as is seen in the Harris et al. (2006) study on teachers' attitudes towards Irish.

It has been claimed that Irish primary school teachers are the ideal candidates for such a programme as they already teach and have a knowledge of both the target language (Irish) and the content subjects: "Irish primary schools are a particularly favourable context for using CLIL as all primary teachers teach Irish" (NCCA, 2019). There is evidence to suggest that the teacher's knowledge of both the target language and the content has great influence on the effectiveness of the CLIL approach (Vásquez & Ellison. 2013). Therefore, the presumption that Irish primary-school teachers are ideal candidates for such an approach is a fair one. However, one of the arguments against the CLIL approach is that the programme negatively impacts the content learning in order to facilitate the language learning. This is seen in the experiences of Irish teachers in the findings of Ó Ceallaigh, Ní Chróinín, Ní Mhurchú's (2016) study. These findings state that during an intervention in which some teachers taught a series of PE lessons through Irish, there was not as much attention paid to the building of specific, new PE skills, as there was to the language objectives: "PE learning received less attention from the teacher resulting in fewer benefits for PE learning than for language learning. PE learning was anticipated as a by-product of participation rather than a primary learning focus for each lesson." (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016).

Furthermore, it is clear from the responses of some of the teachers taking part, that they did not feel confident in teaching both new language and new content skills at the same time. For example; some teachers in the study chose to teach activities or games that the children were already familiar with in order for them to be able to understand and use the language: "I

thought it would be easier not to be teaching Irish and a game at the same time" (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016). Though an understandable approach to take, it was clear from the study that this lack of challenge had an impact on the children's enjoyment and engagement in the lessons. However, it is worth noting that this study was conducted over a short-term basis. This means that teachers may not have had enough time to adapt to the approach and develop their use of CLIL with their class. This is acknowledged as a limitation in the study (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016).

Another study looking at teachers' perspectives of FCÁT in an Irish context highlights issues with planning and resources. Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní Mhaoill's (2018) study looked at student teachers using the CLIL approach on school placement. The participating student teachers reported that the CLIL lessons took significantly longer to plan than other subjects and that there was very little support available in this area. In addition to planning difficulties, the student teachers reported that suitable resources were very difficult to find, as resources created for Gaelscoileanna did not fit the needs of their lessons (Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní Mhaoill, 2018). It should be highlighted that again, this was a small-scale, short-term study. These challenges may become less prominent with more experience and practice as was seen in the aforementioned Infante et al. (2008) study on Italian CLIL teachers. However, it is clear that these issues do seem to pose significant barriers to using the CLIL approach for teachers in the early stages.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the existing literature in relation to CLIL in Irish and international contexts and has looked at some of the challenges and benefits experienced by those who have used CLIL as an approach to language teaching. This section has also detailed some

studies and statistics surrounding attitudes to Irish in general in Ireland and within the Irish education system. These studies will be touched on again in the findings chapter of this study in which the findings will be compared and contrasted with existing literature. The next chapter will outline the way in which data was collected and research was carried out.

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology used in this study to meet the aims and objectives set out in the study. The chapter will discuss the chosen research methodology, why this was chosen and how it was carried out. The process of sampling, data collection and data analysis will also be dealt with in this chapter. The study aimed to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of participating teachers and those involved in creating resources for the CLIL approach for teaching Irish and content. As the CLIL approach is still quite new to Ireland, there is not a huge sample of people who have used it, and as the study focuses on personal perspectives and experiences, the researcher decided that a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews would be most suitable. This would allow the researcher to collect data in the form of detailed accounts of experiences and perspectives. Challenges relating to sourcing participants, limitations of the study and ethical considerations are addressed later in this section.

Methodology

Cohen, Mannion and Morrisson (2007) define research methods as "a range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.47). The researcher

decided upon a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to collect data about perspectives around CLIL and resources for CLIL. This data would then be interpreted and analysed by the researcher to draw conclusions and predictions.

The term qualitative research can be described as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Cresswell, 2014). The research typically involves drawing more general conclusions from the particular experiences of individuals. The term qualitative research covers a range of data collection strategies: ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research and narrative research (Cresswell, 2014).

The researcher decided that the grounded theory approach would be most suitable for this type of study. Denscombe describes grounded theory as "an approach dedicated to generating theories. In this sense it contrasts with approaches concerned with testing theories, and is different from research whose main purpose is to provide descriptive accounts of the subject matter" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 107). The researcher set out to gain a deeper insight into the perspectives of teachers about the use of the CLIL approach based on their individual experiences. Therefore, the principle behind grounded theory of generating theories based on the experiences of participants seemed appropriate rather than testing out a preconceived theory or hypothesis.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection for this study. Interviews as a method of data collection are seen as a human interaction exchanging and producing knowledge between two or more people (Cohen et al, 2007). They are seen as a more personal and open-ended manner of collecting data than methods such as surveys and questionnaires. Interviews are particularly suitable for studies that aim to explore more complex issues such as opinions, feelings and experiences "where the aim of the research is

to understand them rather than to report them in a simple word or two" (Denscombe, 2014, p.186). This study aimed to find out detailed information about the experiences of teachers involved with CLIL. Therefore, the researcher decided that interviews were the best course of action for this study.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the specific method of interviewing as they are particularly suited to the grounded theory approach. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher may have a list of set questions/topics that they will ask or touch on. However, the researcher is also open to new topics arising during individual interviews and focusing on these. There is also a developmental approach used, in that the researcher may take a topic that arose in previous interviews and introduce them to future interviews (Denscombe, 2014). This structure of interviewing lends itself well to the grounded theory approach as it allows for theories and ideas to emerge based on the experiences of participants.

Sampling

Sourcing participants for this study proved to be quite challenging. The CLIL approach is relatively new to Irish schools meaning that there is a very small sample of people who have experience in using the approach. Though this fact justifies the study being carried out, it also poses challenges to the study. Six participants were chosen based on their varied experiences with CLIL. These participants had been involved with CLIL in Irish primary schools in varying contexts: a teacher who had used the CLIL approach in the early stages of the official pilot programme, a teacher who had implemented CLIL during school placement, teachers who had used CLIL in an informal capacity with various classes and a researcher who had created a programme to support the use of the CLIL approach. It should be noted that the participants in this study either have a background or an interest and positive attitude towards

Irish and the teaching of Irish. It could be said that this interest in the language is what lead them to become involved in using the CLIL approach. The participants were contacted informally initially through email or phone to inform them of the research. The participants were either known to the researcher prior to the research or contact was made through mutual acquaintances. Participants were then given more details in the form of a formal letter of consent prior to being interviewed. Though the sample is small, the varying contexts provide a range of different perspectives and a rich insight into numerous approaches to implementing CLIL and the challenges and benefits that are involved.

Research design/ data collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews which all took place remotely over 'Zoom' due to COVID-19 restrictions. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and consisted of approximately 15 questions which had been created by the researcher and refined in collaboration with the research supervisor. Some of the same questions were included in each interview as there were specific areas that the researcher wanted to focus on to meet the objectives of the study. Some interviews included different questions based on the context in which the participant had experienced CLIL (pilot programme, resources, school placement etc.) As the study was guided by the grounded theory approach, in the form of semi-structured interviews, extra questions were asked based on topics and issues that arose in each individual interview or based on topics that were arising in previous interviews (Denscombe, 2014). This allowed for varying perspectives and opinions to be explored and provided valuable insight for the research.

Data Analysis:

Once the interviews were completed, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed to allow for analysis of the data provided. During initial stages of data analysis, when reading and rereading the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher coded the responses according to which interview and which paragraph the relevant responses could be found. This made the next stages of thematic analysis more straight forward. Following this, as the researcher was using the grounded theory approach, the researcher looked for common themes across responses (Dawson, 2002). These themes were then sorted into subcategories. The transcripts were colour coded according to these themes and codes were then created according to category. Once responses were sorted into categories, the researcher was able to begin to plan discussion around general themes that emerged from these individual experiences and look at where the similarities and differences were within the categories.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, sourcing participants for this study proved quite difficult as the CLIL approach is still new to Irish schools and the researcher was under time constraints due to school placement. There are some limitations involved when using interviews as a research method. Interviews can be; time consuming, open to interviewer bias, inconvenient for participants and anonymity may be difficult (Cohen et al, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

Dawson (2002) defines the term 'research ethics' as "treating both the participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect" (Dawson, 2002, p. 146). There are many ethical considerations that must be taken into account when conducting research projects. Ethical issues involved with this study include informed consent of participants, storage of data, anonymity of participants and sourcing of participants. All participants were provided with clear details of what their participation would entail in the form of a formal letter of

consent prior to being interviewed. It was also made clear in this letter that consent to participate could be withdrawn at any stage of the research. The data collected (audio recordings of interviews and interview transcripts) was stored on an encrypted device that only the researcher had access to. Names were not attached to any of the data stored. Furthermore, any names or identifying features of people or institutions were omitted when transcribing interview recordings. When sourcing participants, the researcher ensured that contact details had been given to mutual contact with consent of the participant.

Validity and Transferability

At each step of the research process, the researcher followed research guidelines to ensure the validity of the findings. In this chapter, the steps that were taken in choosing a methodology, sampling, carrying out data collection and data analysis have been clearly outlined. This allows the reader to be sure that the data presented in this study is true and valid. The researcher hopes to achieve transferability by presenting and interpreting the findings as clearly and as accurately as possible. As a result, the reader may be able to apply or transfer the information gathered from the findings to other contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and strategies that were used in this study – how and why they were chosen and how exactly they were used. The chapter has dealt with the sampling process and the challenges encountered during this process as well as the limitations that are involved with this study. All ethical considerations involved with the sampling, data collection and data analysis have been discussed. The participants in this study provided extremely rich insights about their experiences of using CLIL. Though each participant had adopted various different approaches to using CLIL in their classrooms, their responses and experiences were very positive overall. This indicates that CLIL could

contribute greatly to both language and content learning in Ireland and could offer an integrated solution to the time constraints of the Irish primary school curriculum. This will be explored in more detail in the findings and discussion chapter.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will detail the main findings taken from the interviews conducted during the data collection stage. It will outline the participants' varying experiences using the CLIL approach in Irish primary schools. The perspectives shared during these interviews are positive overall with all participants stating that they would like to continue using the approach in the future. Some challenges and disadvantages to using CLIL are also addressed. The data has been divided into three main themes: Approaches to teaching CLIL, Attitudes to Irish and the issue of Resources. These themes and their respective subcategories are dealt with in separate sections throughout the chapter and then summarised at the end.

Participants

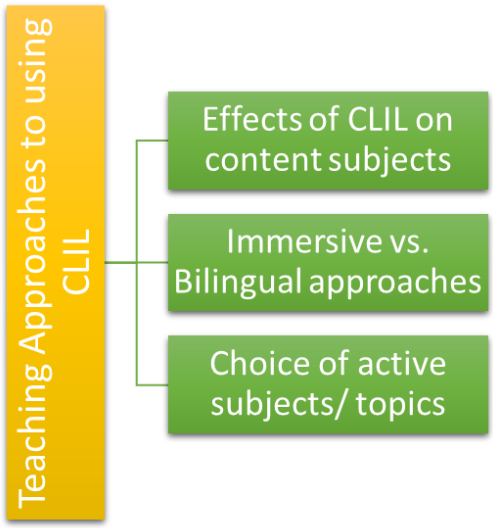
Fig. 1:

Participants:	**Class:**	**Experience of CLIL:**
Participant 1	4th Class	Pilot School (PE, History, Art)
Participant 2	N/A	Creation of CLIL programme/resources (Drama)

Participant 3	1st Class	School Placement (PE)
Participant 4	1st Class, 4th Class	Informal (Lá Gaeilge)
Participant 5	1st and 2nd Class (multigrade)	Informal (SESE & PE)
Participant 6	1st Class	Informal (PE)

Approaches to teaching CLIL

Fig 2:



The use of varying teaching approaches to the use of CLIL arose as an important overarching theme while conducting the interviews for this research. Within this theme are a number of subcategories as can be seen in the graphic above. These subcategories will be discussed separately within this section.

On the topic of choice of subjects with which to use the CLIL approach, there was an overall consensus among all participants that the more active subjects worked best. The most popular subjects among these participants were PE and SESE with some of the arts subjects being included as well. When asked why certain subjects were chosen, most gave the response that this was an active and fun subject for the children which would help with the understanding of the language being used and also would help with the children's attitude towards the language. For example; participant 6 gave the reason:

> I chose PE for a few reasons. Because both student and teacher are highly active in PE and there is a lot of teacher-modelling it is easier to teach the new vocab by physically doing things. I feel that teaching PE through Irish is manageable because I don't need any extra resources to do it. As I model the exercises, drills and activities I can also model the language clearly.

Participant 5 gave similar reasoning as to why she chose PE and SESE:

> I think because they're more active, it's easier to incorporate or use Irish to teach a lesson because there's not so much vocabulary. But they can see what you're doing. And by seeing what you're doing, they're understanding what you're saying in Irish.

Some of the participants gave other reasons for their subject choice. This was related to the historical and cultural ties that the Irish language naturally has with some subjects on the curriculum such as History and Drama. These participants felt that not only could the use of these content subjects add to the children's language skills but that the Irish would add greatly to the teaching of the content subject and play into the ties the language has with these subjects. For example, participant 2 stated that:

People never really talk about the benefits for drama which is strange because there's such rich resources written, like dramas written in Irish and there are actually nuanced understandings with Irish that is not present in stories written in English for children.

This sentiment was also reflected in participant 1's response when discussing his school's choice to include History as one of their CLIL subjects:

We know the huge range of Irish history books that are available and that we could use again to teach the kids because we were going to focus on 1916 and the Easter Rising which of course was hugely involved with the Irish language.

This idea of Irish being able to add to the content subject as well as the content subject adding to the language leads into the next topic; the effect that the CLIL approach had on the learning of the content subjects. The Ó Ceallaigh et al (2016) study found that overall, the CLIL approach hindered the learning of the content subject (PE) for the sake of the language learning. As was mentioned in the literature review section of this study, there is an ongoing debate within CLIL research around the issue of the effect on the content learning. Some people are of the opinion that language objectives may be prioritised over content objectives or vice versa in some cases. (Breidbach & Medina-Suarez, 2016). Conversely, the findings of this study did not correlate with these findings. Most participants felt that it was possible to develop skills in both the language and the content. However, it was noted that for this to happen, every CLIL lesson had to have very clear objectives for both the language and the content. When asked if she felt the CLIL approach compromised the content learning for the sake of the language learning, participant 4 responded:

I don't think that it interferes but I do think for certain subjects, you have to make sure that your objectives in both Gaeilge and your content subject are going to be attainable even if

they don't understand absolutely everything you're saying. Your message has to be clear and you have to be able to do it through gestures or props or actions as well.

Most participants agreed with this sentiment. Again, participant 2, even pointed out how language can have a positive effect on the content subject learning rather than hindering it: "Additional language is really helpful for something like drama because you're already taking on a new identity, so you can do that sometimes more easily through another language, it offers you that freedom to say things"

However, participant 6 did feel that in most cases, the CLIL approach would compromise the content learning to a certain degree:

I think it would compromise objectives because I think the scaffolding and constant revision of new vocabulary for the language learning purpose could take away from the subject content learning. I think it requires much more scaffolding and therefore takes away time for independent activities and I think the continuous revision and checking in to see if the child has understood the language takes a lot of time and as we know time is very tight within our curriculum.

In this statement, the participant has addressed the issue of the packed curriculum and time limitations within this that was mentioned in previous chapters of this study. The participant feels that the CLIL approach would add to this struggle rather than helping to improve integration within the tight time constraints.

Participant 6 raises valid concerns which are in line with other studies (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2016). Therefore, the opinion could be drawn that there is merit in the argument that the use of CLIL does have an impact on the content learning, at least, in the early stages. However, in this study, the majority of participants felt that they had been able to achieve high quality teaching and learning, meeting both the language and content objectives when using the

CLIL approach. One may draw the conclusion that while there may be an impact on content learning in the beginning, that over time, the benefits of bilingualism begin to take effect and that both the content and language learning benefit from the approach. This is seen in the Infante et al. (2008) study in which teachers who have had long-term experience using CLIL expressed that finding a balance between the language and content learning became easier over time. Additionally, it was noted by some respondents in that study that the CLIL approach also had cognitive benefits for the learners which shows the positive effect bilingualism can have on learning in general (Infante et al., 2008).

Bilingual and immersive approaches also emerged as a significant topic in this study. The document published by the NCCA introducing the official pilot programme for CLIL in Irish schools recommends a bilingual approach, particularly at the beginning, to alleviate pressure on both children and teachers (NCCA, 2019).

This was the approach taken by participant 1 who was teaching in one of the pilot schools:

> We didn't want the child not saying a sentence because they didn't know a word. We wanted it to be more comfortable for them, for example, ‘tabhair dom an ball’, if it was that case. Now of course, higher level, but we wanted them to be comfortable and happy and confident in that they can answer the questions or respond to each other

Participant 5 also stated that she had started with an immersive approach to CLIL but that if she was to do it again that she would try and start with a more bilingual approach and build up to an immersive approach. She felt the immersive approach was “too much, too soon” for some children and that this may have inhibited their learning.

On the other hand, participant 3 used a full immersive approach and felt that this ultimately brought the children’s language on as the lessons progressed. There is ample research to

support the use of immersive approaches for language teaching both in Irish and international contexts (Ó Baoill, 2007) (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015) (Ó Dhuibhir et al., 2015).

Participant 2 created a CLIL-specific programme to support the teaching of drama through Irish. When discussing the resource she had created, participant 2 encouraged a predominantly immersive approach explaining that this could be built up over time. This approach is supported by the resource that the participant had made as it includes staged activities in which the children are gradually introduced to more Irish throughout the day:

> The beginning couple of exercises are only five minutes of Irish. For CLIL or for any kind of target language teaching, they usually say that around 90% of the lesson should be in the target language, so that's what you're working towards. I think the way to work towards that is by incrementally doing longer lessons in Irish. But for sure in some of them (the activities) there is a mixture of languages.

This is something that was mentioned by all participants in the study; the importance of pre teaching specific vocab and exposing the children to more Irish outside of the formal Irish lesson prior to introducing CLIL lessons. All participants, whether using bilingual or immersive approaches, identified this as a vital factor in the success of their CLIL experiences. Based on these responses and based on the literature available on language learning, it can be concluded that a gradual and staged approach is necessary for CLIL to be effective and suitable for all learners. A staged approach would involve beginning with a bilingual approach to ease pupils into it. However, this should be done with a very clear objective of moving towards an immersive approach. There are numerous studies that show that for language learning to be effective a predominantly immersive approach must be taken. An Irish rich environment in which Irish is used and encouraged often, would also be a significant element of this staged approach.

Resources

Fig 3:

The use and availability of resources was an important theme in this study. The responses in relation to this particular theme varied between participants depending on the context in which they were using the CLIL approach. Some participants found it very difficult to find any suitable resources for their CLIL lessons and this was identified by some as a challenge that was involved in using the CLIL approach. For example, participant 3 stated that:

> If you search CLIL resources as Gaeilge for PE the resources are slim to none. There's not a big bank of resources out there that you can find. And even how you actually go about it, it's not really that clear cut, I know there's a bit in the PTSD and there's a bit in the teacher guidelines but it doesn't really go into how you do it so that was the biggest challenge.

This participant felt that this challenge could be a factor in turning people off using the approach in the future as having to create all your own resources would add pressure to an already packed curriculum workload. This was also identified in the Ní Dhiorbháin & Ní

Mhaoill (2018) study in which student teachers found planning and finding resources to be a significant challenge when using the CLIL approach on school placement.

In contrast, participant 1 who was teaching in one of the pilot schools for the CLIL programme in Ireland, stated that the school had received resources for PE from the DES as part of the pilot programme which supported the teaching of CLIL. Furthermore, this participant said that he had planned to also use some books that would have been designed for use in Irish-medium schools. This teacher did not think that resources designed for a Gaelscoil would have been too difficult for his class as he was confident enough with his own level of Irish that he would be able to scaffold the children's learning and fill in any gaps in knowledge: "My own background and comfort in the subject could have helped that I could look into it and again fortunately I was in a Gaelscoil in 6th class so I could support the children from their side of learning"

Conversely, participant 4 felt that resources designed for Irish-medium schools would be too difficult for the level her class was at and that this would compromise the content objectives:

> I think generally speaking for resources for Gaelscoileanna, I'd feel they're too difficult for 3rd Class or for the class that I have. I suppose I could go on to 1st or 2nd class things for Gaelscoileanna, but then the content can at times be quite babyish.

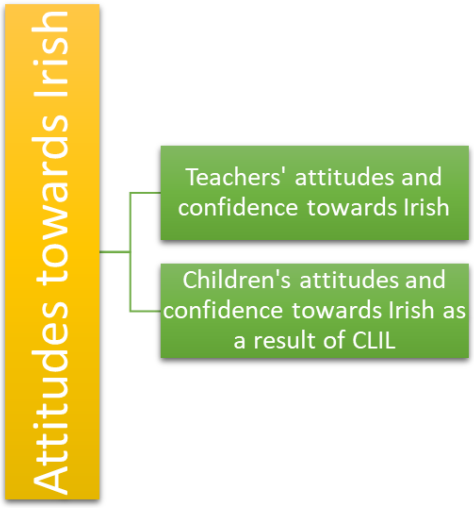
This correlates with what was found in the Bovellan (2014) study in which it was stated that Finnish teachers using the CLIL approach to teach English found it difficult to find suitable resources. The English language resources available to them for geography centered on British geography rather than Finnish geography. This then would compromise the learning as the content would not be relevant to those pupils' lives and surroundings (Bovellan, 2014). Similarly, it could be said that though there are many books and resources available in all the subjects on the primary school curriculum in Irish, these resources, for the most part would

not be suitable for use in CLIL lessons as these books have been designed for children who are used to learning all content through Irish. This was found to be true among a majority of the participants in this study. However, as is seen in the above quote from participant 1; teachers may feel that the use of Gaelscoil resources is suitable if they are confident in their own Irish as to scaffold the children's learning.

Based on these responses, one might conclude that for successful CLIL implementation in Irish schools, more CLIL specific programmes and resources are needed across all the curricular subjects, such as the one for drama written by participant 2. Resources designed for Irish-medium schools may also be useful for CLIL lessons further down the line when the children have had ample experience with the approach.

Attitudes towards Irish (as a result of the CLIL approach)

Fig. 4:



The findings of this study show that attitudes towards, and confidence in, Irish are generally improved by the use of the CLIL approach. This was the case for both the teachers involved and the children they were teaching. Responses from participants showed a number of ways in which this improvement in attitude could be seen in the pupils. Many responses showed

that there was an initial reluctance or hesitancy in the children surrounding the use of Irish in lessons or contexts other than their normal Gaeilge lesson. Participant 5 stated that:

> They were saying, 'oh, why is teacher talking Irish? We're finished the Irish lesson. What are you doing?' But by pointing and gesturing and by following the routine they're getting used to it and more comfortable with it. It's more of a normal thing for them now.

In this participant's experience, the children grew less reluctant and more accepting of Irish being used outside of the Gaeilge lesson. This resulted in them feeling more comfortable with the topic. Similarly, participant 2 touched on this idea as an important element of the CLIL resource that she made:

> The first couple of sections are about preparing students to be able to do another subject through Irish, so there's language awareness activities, there's five-minute Irish activities just to get the kids used to doing Irish for another couple of minutes of the day.

This shows a direct link between some of the CLIL resources that are available and the way in which teachers are experiencing the use of CLIL in their classrooms. It is clear from these responses that, particularly in the early stages, it is important when introducing CLIL, that the children are used to hearing and using Irish more throughout the day as has been previously suggested in this chapter.

Participant 3 also reflected, in relation to children's attitudes and confidence in Irish, that the class would have had quite negative attitudes towards doing PE through Irish at the beginning. The participant stated that this may have been due to lack of understanding, but that their attitudes had improved by the last lesson: "I did a questionnaire with the kids before starting about their attitudes towards Irish and it was really low, some of the kids would be very negative towards Irish…I did the evaluation again, and definitely, their attitudes had changed, I did a scale of 1 to 10 and it had gone up by the end."

This response shows that, for the children in this case, increased exposure and use of the language in the CLIL lessons increased their confidence and in turn, improved their general attitudes towards Irish. Increased confidence as a result of the CLIL lessons was also seen as an important factor in participant 4's experience. When asked if the approach had had any effect, positive or negative, on the children's competence in Irish, participant 4 stated:

> I think so, certainly in their confidence… in knowing that 'we managed a whole school day and it was all Irish and while I didn't understand everything, I got through it all and I was able to communicate' and I think just realising that they can do so much more than just their textbook, when they can see it as a living language like that, it's so important.

Again, this shows that while there may be a reluctance towards the approach in the beginning, once the children see that they are able to use the language in another subject and engage with the objectives of both the language and the content, that they are encouraged and that their confidence and enthusiasm grows as a result. CLIL was introduced in Ireland as part of the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language, the aim of which was to increase the number of daily Irish speakers in Ireland (DES, 2013). The responses in this small-scale study suggest that the CLIL approach could play a role in improving pupils' attitudes towards Irish. The improvement of attitudes alone is not sufficient to increase the number of daily speakers. It is noted in the Ó Dhuibhir et al. (2015) report on minority language teaching that there are a number of other important factors, outside of the school involved, such as; language use in the home and community, attitudes towards language in the media. However, it could be said that the improvement in attitudes among CLIL pupils is a step in the right direction towards an increase in daily speakers.

Participant 4 also reflected that her own enthusiasm towards using the approach was an incredibly important factor in getting 'buy in' from the children and making them see it as

something positive and exciting. This leads into the topic of the teachers' attitudes and confidence in Irish as a result of using the CLIL approach. Most participants in this study were quite confident in their Irish before using the approach and reported that this was improved through using CLIL. For example, participant 1 stated that using the approach gave him a chance to engage in continuous professional development and build on the Irish he already had by using it in a different context. Similarly, participant 4 stated that even though it takes more planning and preparation to ensure that she has all the vocab she needs, that she gains great satisfaction from using the approach:

> It's great fun, teaching it, you're wrecked, whether you're good at Irish or not, you're still trying to think in Irish and obviously that can be hard and you're probably a bit more drained. But every single time I do it I'm like why don't I do this more often? Because it's so brilliant with kids and you're kind of buzzing off the kids

This reflects the Harris et al. (2006) study which suggests that teachers who have a higher exposure to the language (such as teachers in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools) gain greater satisfaction from teaching the language. This indicates that the CLIL approach could offer an opportunity for teachers not working in Irish-medium or Gaeltacht schools to expose themselves to more Irish within their teaching.

Participant 5 also recommended that teachers should choose a subject that they enjoy teaching and in which they are confident as this will make it easier for them to teach it through Irish. This idea is echoed by participant 6 who reflected that though she was confident in her Irish for teaching PE with 1st Class, she perhaps wouldn't be so comfortable teaching science to a senior class through Irish. This correlates with what is recommended in the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) for teachers using the CLIL approach (NCCA, 2015).

This also reflects what is stated in the Vasquez & Ellison (2013) study which found that teachers' knowledge of the target language and the content subject were of great importance for the effectiveness of CLIL. As was previously suggested in this chapter, having an Irish-rich environment in the classroom before ever beginning CLIL and building up to introducing the approach gradually is essential to the success of the approach. To be able to provide this environment teachers need to be confident in Irish.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed the data collected during the interview stage of the research and has compared these findings with those of other pertinent literature. The responses have been presented according to the three main themes that arose during data analysis. In the Approaches to Teaching CLIL theme, topics such as pre-teaching vocab and exposing children to more Irish throughout the day emerged as strategies that were integral to the experiences of all participants. Under the theme of resources, there were some differences in opinions around the use of Gaelscoil resources, though it was clear that a wider range of CLIL specific resources is needed. Finally, in the theme of Attitudes towards Irish, all participants stated that their own attitudes and their pupils' attitudes towards Irish had generally improved. Recommendations based on these findings will be outlined in the Conclusion chapter of the paper.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations for future implementation of the CLIL approach in Irish primary schools based on the teachers' perspectives shared during this research. These recommendations are based on the findings of this research as well as the existing literature in this area.

- The pre-teaching of lesson specific vocab prior to the CLIL lesson itself is a vital part of a successful implementation of CLIL. Furthermore, getting the children used to hearing Irish more throughout the school day, outside of their formal Irish lesson, eases the transition into CLIL lessons. An Irish-rich environment, in which use of Irish outside the Gaeilge lesson is modelled and encouraged often, should be present in the class prior to introducing CLIL. This can be done in a variety of ways such as short activities (Deir Ó Grádaigh, meditations in Irish), Irish songs, using Irish during casual games or during Golden Time.

- The teacher's enthusiasm was also identified as an important factor in a successful implementation of CLIL. If the teacher is showing positivity and enjoyment towards CLIL lessons, the children will also be more enthusiastic towards the lessons.

- Every CLIL lesson should have very clear and simple language and content objectives. These objectives should be attainable and suitably challenging for the children in the class. This will ensure that the content objectives are met as well as the language objectives.

- The provision of more standardised resources, specific to CLIL teaching methods would enhance teachers' experiences of using the CLIL method and decrease the preparation time required.

Opportunities for future research

The findings of this small-scale study suggest that CLIL could contribute greatly to teaching and learning of language and of content in Irish primary schools. More research is needed to develop the use of CLIL methods in Ireland. Areas of research that could be developed upon in the area of CLIL in Irish primary schools include case studies of schools participating in the pilot programme supported by the DES, once the programme starts again. One of the limitations involved with this study was that most of the participants had a background in Irish or a positive attitude towards Irish. Future studies may investigate teachers who are not so confident in their own Irish and what their experiences of using the CLIL approach would look like. Lastly, the teachers in this study reported that, in their opinion, most of the children they taught enjoyed and benefitted from the CLIL approach. It would be valuable to CLIL research to undertake a longitudinal study observing children who are participating in the CLIL approach and investigating their perspectives about it.

Conclusion

This research aimed to gain and present a detailed understanding of varying CLIL approaches that are being used in Irish primary schools based on perspectives of participating teachers. The researcher also hoped to make recommendations for future implementation of the CLIL approach based on these experiences.

Existing literature around CLIL approaches in Ireland and internationally was reviewed and presented. This literature focused on teachers' perspectives of their experiences with CLIL as well as general attitudes towards Irish in Ireland.

Data was then collected through interviews with participants. This data was thematically analysed and presented according to three overarching themes. These themes are: Approaches to Teaching CLIL; Resources and Attitudes towards Irish. Within these themes, the findings were generally very positive. Though there was a small sample in this study, the findings suggest that the CLIL approach can be successful in a number of different contexts and that it could contribute greatly to teaching and learning in Irish schools in the future. Some challenges in relation to the approach have also been identified. Sourcing resources and extra planning time proved to be quite challenging aspects of the approach for some participants. Furthermore, some participants found that the CLIL approach sometimes required too much scaffolding around the language and therefore, took away from the content learning. These issues correlated with the findings in some Irish literature based on teachers' experiences of CLIL. However, the majority of the findings were positive. Namely, the growth of both the children's and teachers' confidence in Irish was identified as a positive aspect of using the approach. Most participants found that both language objectives and content objectives could be met with correct planning, with some also pointing out that the use of the Irish language can add greatly to the content learning as well. A majority of participants in this study derived satisfaction and enjoyment from their CLIL experiences and all participants claimed that they would continue using the approach in the future.

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Appendix

Participant letter of consent

Dear Teacher,

My name is Nóirín Ní Bhrolcháin. I am a student studying a Professional Master of Education in Marino Institute of Education. As part of my studies I must conduct a research project.

I am writing to ask for your help with research that investigates the perspectives of participating teachers on the value of the Content and Language Integrated Learning programme for teaching Irish. I hope to gain a deeper insight into the programme by looking at the experiences of participating teachers such as yourself.

I would like to interview you about your experiences and opinions on using the CLIL programme to teach Irish and content. The interview would last for approximately 30 minutes or less and it would be recorded on audiotape. The questions will focus mainly on topics such as resources, supports, and your experiences and opinions of using the approach.

I hope you will be willing to participate because your responses are important and a valued part of the study. Your participation will remain strictly confidential. Your name will not be attached to any of the data you provide. You are welcome to discontinue participation in the study at any time, should you wish to do so. Every effort will be made to ensure your identity is protected. The data you share will be kept in a secure location or on an encrypted device without your name attached to it. The data will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. Once the study is completed, the data will be destroyed on the basis of the schedule outlined in the Institute's data retention schedule.

If you would like more information on how long the data will be retained for, please don't hesitate to contact me directly. There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. You will be asked to sign forms (below) indicating agreement to participate in the study.

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research. Should you have questions regarding your participation, please contact me by phone at XXX or by email at XXX

This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the

Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the

ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie

Yours faithfully,

_____Nóirín Ní Bhrolcháin_____

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

Please read the question below and indicate whether or not you would be willing to participate in the study as described.

Do you consent to be interviewed based on your experiences and opinions of CLIL and to have the interview audiotaped?

Yes / No

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____