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Examining the Relationship between Exposure to English in Non-Language Classes and Motivation to Use English during Free Time Activities

Abstract

Due to the necessity of English knowledge for international education, business, and travel, students, parents, and educators have made English language learning a priority from an early age. However, traditional English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms are no longer the only option. Types of classes which integrate language learning and course subject material are becoming more common throughout Europe and worldwide.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between students' participation in non-language (e.g., math, science, history) classes taught fully or partly in English and their use of English during free time activities. Data collected from a large-scale survey of 1,403 Czech lower secondary students from different types of schools is examined. About half of the students in the sample came from public or private multi-year grammar schools, which are generally prestigious and selective institutions. The other half of the students came from public or private basic schools. Findings suggest that students who participate in Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and English as a medium of instruction (EMI) classes are overall more likely to engage in English-related free time activities and are significantly more likely to participate in activities that require active communication with other English speakers. Thus, these CLIL and EMI students use English in free time activities more often, which further supports their English knowledge and skills. These students also are more likely to hold a certificate in English and more likely to use English for active communication. In future research, the role that socio-economic status (SES) plays in free time activities and CLIL and EMI participation is examined, as it is possible that both activities are supported by highly-educated, high SES parents.

Keywords: CLIL, EMI, EFL, motivation, the Czech Republic

Introduction

Content language integrated learning (CLIL) and English medium of instruction (EMI) are two types of language teaching that have emerged in recent years. CLIL has flourished within the education systems of the EU countries in which there is an undeniable need for multilingualism in order to facilitate trade, travel, education, and general communication among citizens in the linguistically diverse member states (Pérez-Cañado, 2012). In many countries, such as the Czech Republic, schools offer bilingual classes as early as first grade (Smith Slamova, 2021).

CLIL consists of combining language teaching and subject course material so that language and subject matter content are taught in tandem. Such instruction requires teachers and materials that are able to facilitate the learning of both foreign language skills and subject course content material (Kao, 2022). Although this type of classroom situation can be challenging to achieve, students can benefit from

language learning in a more natural way than traditional EFL classes (Lasagabaster, 2011).

EMI is another type of language and content teaching that has become popular in universities, although depending on the English proficiency of students, it can be offered at any level of education. This form of instruction consists of presenting the content material in English without a focus on language learning specifically. Thus, students must already have a high level of English language proficiency (Reus, 2020). EMI differs from CLIL in that the language learning aspect is implicit, but because the material is delivered in English, students may learn new vocabulary from context clues or self-study (e.g., looking up unknown vocabulary). However, in CLIL settings, language and course subject matter are taught co-equally with an explicit focus on both types of learning (Reynaert, 2019). Additionally, within CLIL classes, the first language (L1) of students may be used at times to explain a concept (Kao, 2022), however in EMI, all content is delivered in English. EMI is used at many universities around the world that attract, or hope to attract, a variety of international students (Reus, 2020). Using EMI, instructors are able to deliver instruction to students from diverse language backgrounds simultaneously.

Parents and educators are aware of the need for students to learn English, and thus, the need for CLIL and EMI classes, in which English can be learned in a more natural setting (Reynaert, 2019) and potentially prepare students for tertiary education in an international setting, providing a vital learning opportunity. This is also true in the Czech Republic considering that Czech is not a widely spoken language, there is a great need for students to be prepared to communicate using English, not only academically, but in a wide variety of business and social situations.

Outside of school, naturalistic use of English has been found to have an impact on students' overall English learning (Chan, 2012). Students' use of English during their free time generally includes such activities as listening to songs, watching movies, reading books, using social media, playing video games, and chatting with friends and family etc., and as such, activates use of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Research has found that students who use English during their free time activities demonstrate better oral skills and more vocabulary knowledge (Sundqvist, 2009) than their peers. Not only does free time use of English mean that students are being exposed to more versatile and natural uses of English, through movies, songs, social media, etc., it also demonstrates that students are motivated to seek out contact with English by their own directive (Chusanachoti, 2009).

Merikivi and Pietilä (2014) found that sixth grade CLIL learners in Finland had significantly larger average receptive and productive English vocabulary sizes (receptively 4,500 word families, productively 2,300) than their mainstream EFL counterparts (receptively 1,800 word families, productively 800). However, it was also found that CLIL students read more in English during their free time, and consequently, the students who reported reading in English in their free time were found to have the highest vocabulary sizes. These findings suggest that perhaps CLIL settings encourage more free time reading in English, and in turn, free time reading positively influences L2 vocabulary knowledge.

Nguyen and Stracke (2021) found that English learners mostly focused on test based goals and were dependent on their teachers during classroom learning.

However, free time activities using English allowed students full autonomy over their learning and in these types of activities, students focused more on development of their actual English skills, rather than preparation for a test or knowledge assessment. Chan (2012) had similar findings in that out of class English activities helped students internalize and understand the need for English learning and also improved their in-class performance. Both aforementioned studies found that increased language learning autonomy was associated with English-related free time activities. Thus, there is a need for English-related free time activities in order to bolster overall second language (L2) learning and motivation. As Chan (2012) suggested, the wide-spread use of English in popular culture can be harnessed by educators, students, and parents to promote an interest in learning English.

Research

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between attending non-language classes that are taught fully or partly in English and participation in English-related free time activities specifically. As such, the research question is as follows:

Is there a relationship between attending non-language classes taught fully or partly in English and students' use of English during free time activities?

Participants and data collection

Data was collected from 1,403 Czech students at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) students, roughly 14 and 15 years of age. The sample group of students was distributed across the Czech Republic. Samples were taken from schools all in the Czech Republic within the following school types: basic public schools, basic private schools, public multi-year grammar schools, and private multi-year grammar schools. It should be noted that multi-year grammar schools, and private schools are over-represented in the sample when compared to the actual student population in the Czech Republic. Multi-year grammar schools, otherwise known as multi-year gymnasium (in Czech *víceleté gymnázium*), generally have more demanding curricula and require entry tests, as such they tend to attract high achieving students. Private schools of either type require higher amounts of tuition expenses than public schools, thus enrollment in private schools generally indicates a higher socioeconomic status. As such, a large proportion of the students in the sample have some privilege in terms of academics, socio-economic status, and access to language learning.

The students in the sample reported whether they were taught non-language subjects either partly or fully in English. This type of education includes CLIL and EMI classes. Students were specifically instructed not to include English as a foreign language (EFL) classes or English conversation classes when responding, but instead were given options of classes taught fully or partly in English such as mathematics, natural history, and physical education. Although the total sample of the large-scale survey included 1,403 students, out of this sample, 300 (21.4%) students reported that they had participated in such classes in the last year. For the purpose of this paper, we label these students as CLIL or EMI participants.

Engagement in free time activities using English was also measured. We classified free time activities as any activity not required as a part of academic

coursework. Students were asked about free time activities that they participate in for their own enjoyment, socialization, or personal growth etc. In order to measure this variable, students reported how many hours a week they participated in activities in English during their free time. They were also asked to indicate which type of activity (speaking, reading, writing, or listening) and to specify what the activity consisted of (i.e., reading articles online, speaking in video conferences, watching movies in English without subtitles, etc.).

Analysis

For the purpose of this conference contribution, the reported free time activities of students who had participated in CLIL or EMI classes (n=300) were compared with students who had not participated in those types of classes (n=1,103). We compare the results of the self-reported data from both types of students.

Findings

Overall, participants reported generally high levels of participation in English-related free time activities. This may be given by the fact that about half of the students in the sample are from multi-year grammar schools. Also about one third of the sample consists of students from private schools. Private schools typically put a large emphasis on educational elements, many of which in the Czech Republic focus specifically on language education.

On average for the entire sample, CLIL and EMI students reported using English more in all free time activities except listening to music. Over 95% of both types of students reported listening to music in English in their free time. However, this is not surprising considering music in English is wide-spread in the Czech Republic, with many radio stations only playing music from English speaking countries.

The biggest difference in reported free time activities was the percentage of students who speak English face-to-face. A rather large percentage (70.3%) of CLIL and EMI students reported speaking English in person for at least one hour per week, while only 50.2% of non-CLIL/EMI students reported the same. The percentage of students who use English in phone or video calls was also notable, with 64.7% of CLIL and EMI students reporting that they participate in this activity, whilst the percentage of non-CLIL/EMI students was 43.3% for this activity.

Data was also collected regarding English certificates and it was found that 43% of CLIL/EMI students held certificates in English, while only 11% of non-CLIL/EMI students had received some type of English certification. Thus, a sizable percentage of these students from CLIL and EMI classes have also undergone tests or some other type of certification process, in order to demonstrate their English proficiency levels, especially when compared with their non-CLIL/EMI counterparts.

Conclusion

Students who use English in free time activities have been found to be more motivated to learn English overall and have shown improvement in their in-class performance (Chan, 2012). The results of the study showed that a higher percentage

of CLIL and EMI students reported participating in English-related free time activities than their non-CLIL/EMI counterparts, and the activities with the most significant differences were those that required active participation with other English speakers such as phone/video calls and speaking face-to-face. Thus, it could be that CLIL and EMI students perhaps have more access to other English speakers due to socio-economic reasons (parents with higher education, travel opportunities, etc.). Previous research has found that Czech students at the primary education level from both public and private schools who were enrolled in CLIL English classes generally had more well-educated parents and higher academic aspirations despite school type (Smith Slamova, 2021).

Additionally, motivation to use English outside of school may also be affected by CLIL/EMI participation. Previous research has shown higher levels of L2 motivation among CLIL students when compared with EFL students (Lasagabaster, 2011; Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2014). The findings from this contribution suggest that CLIL and EMI students are more motivated to seek out English-related activities during their free time, whether for self-improvement or simply the purpose of enjoyment. The fact that CLIL and EMI classes integrate language learning into other fields of knowledge can instill an understanding of the importance of foreign language knowledge for life and learning and not only for the purposes of passing a test (Chan, 2012). Additionally, Simons et al. (2019) found that students in Belgium who were enrolled in CLIL courses experienced increased self-confidence in their language skills, and were more likely to use the target language for active communication. In this way, these types of classes can motivate students to continue to learn in ways that are personally meaningful to them outside of school.

Regarding language anxiety, CLIL and EMI students could perhaps experience less English speaking and listening anxiety outside of the classroom due to the nature of their in-class language learning. However, Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2014) found that 12-13 year old students in CLIL classrooms initially experienced more language learning classroom anxiety than traditional EFL students, but this anxiety decreased with long-term exposure to CLIL. It is also reported that the findings of initially higher anxiety levels could also be attributed to the challenge of the content subject matter rather than being L2 specific. Simons et al. (2019) also found that students in CLIL courses initially experienced more foreign language anxiety, but that with time, the anxiety drastically decreased, especially anxiety about making errors in the L2. This study also found that parents of CLIL students reported that after CLIL exposure, their children were more likely to communicate in the L2 outside of class, for example, at home or while traveling abroad.

Findings from this research suggest that students who have attended non-language classes taught fully or partly in English are more likely to use English during their free time activities, which further supports the development of their English skills. These students are also more likely to hold a certificate in English and more likely to use English for active communication with other English speakers outside of school.

Recommendations for further research include studies on L2 anxiety levels outside of the classroom among traditional EFL students and CLIL/EMI students, as well as research that examines the relationship between English-related free time activities and L2 motivation and achievement in the classroom.

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