Summary

Theory and practice in CLIL course design: the importance of needs analysis

Alongside ESP (English for Specific Purposes), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has been enjoying widespread popularity. A CLIL course is a content-led course where the learning objectives are primarily subject-related and not language-oriented, which means that the development of certain language skills takes place within a subject course. The benefits of CLIL are manifold: it takes language learning beyond traditional approaches and offers new perspectives for the learner and the teacher alike. Furthermore, applying CLIL in tertiary education helps adult students to acquire a foreign language more effectively because their motivation is likely to increase when they understand why they are learning (Morgado et al. 2015: 19) and when they can immediately put the language learned into practice.

The application of CLIL seems to entail an easy way to get two in one, yet designing a CLIL course from scratch is a challenging prospect that involves commitment and cooperation as well as dispelling misconceptions that arise from the application of CLIL methodology. CLIL theories lay a great emphasis on conducting a needs analysis before designing a CLIL course. However, the needs analyses suggested tend to be student-centred with a focus on students’ language learning needs, their expectations as well as professional and personal needs (Morgado et al 2015: 52). Although relevant and necessary before any CLIL course design, such needs analyses may not prove to be the best starting point in situations where the teaching staff have not had sufficient training and preparation to apply the CLIL approach. Therefore, it is important to prepare the ground for the introduction of CLIL by identifying the conception of the approach among the teaching personnel and by establishing a common understanding in order to avoid miscommunication. This step can be seen as needs analysis phase 1, the aim of which is to cement a shared perception of what teaching language through content entails. In addition to the explication of the concept, the issues of cooperation, arrangement of classes, teaching methods as well as language and content competence need to be addressed. This teacher-focused stage helps to minimise misconceptions arising from the lack of contact with CLIL practices and it can serve as a precondition for moving on to phase 2, or the student-centred needs analysis. In phase 2, the focus of the needs analysis is shifted to content-related goals, language learning needs and the development of subject specific as well as transferable skills. The two-phase needs analysis can provide a broader perspective on the application of CLIL and may facilitate the process of course design.

References

Morgado et al. 2015. *ReCLes.pt CLIL Training Guide. Creating a CLIL Learning Community in Higher Education*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293654568_ReCLespt_CLIL_Training_Guide_Creating_a_CLIL_Learning_Community_in_Higher_Education>, accessed 23.02.2023