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CLIL in teaching pupils with special needs

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Introduction

Education of pupils with special needs (PSN) has been studied for several decades (see e.g. Farrell, 2001). In many countries, it is an exception to find a homogeneous classroom where PSN are not present, which increases the demands on the teacher. At present, the traditional understanding of PSN is challenged by the presence of pupils with different mother tongues and low level of understanding the language of instruction, which is in most cases the mother tongue of the majority of pupils in the classroom. These children are in some countries considered as PSN while other countries do not classify them as such, despite the fact that they require similar support.

The poster presents results of a study of implementing CLIL¹ in classrooms with PSN. Attention is paid to the rules for creating suitable CLIL materials for this environment. Three pillars originally developed for materials in linguistically and socio-culturally heterogeneous classes are considered as the basis; the reported study suggests that they are appropriate if principles for teaching pupils with special needs are added.

Theoretical background

In the Czech Republic, there is an increasing demand for using non-traditional teaching strategies that develop pupils' language skills and thus their preparedness for future career, like e.g. CLIL. There are studies about the pros and cons of using CLIL, the majority of which present CLIL as a useful teaching strategy. However, taking into account the introduction, there are very few studies about using CLIL with PSN. We found only one work focusing on this issue (Karlíková, 2020). Karlíková studies CLIL teaching at primary school with a focus on PSN, specifically on pupils with learning disabilities and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Her research shows that CLIL has no negative impact on the sample of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time her research neither confirms nor refutes the potential of teaching CLIL to pupils with learning disabilities. There are many questions that still need to be paid attention to and validated.

In Novotná, Moraová and Ulovec (2021) and Novotná, Ulovec and Moraová (2020), three pillars for a successful creation of materials for teaching in culturally and socio-culturally heterogeneous primary and secondary classrooms are presented and discussed: *Topics of interest for all pupils, Using*

¹ CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning refers to the teaching of a non-linguistic subject through a foreign language. CLIL works with an equilibrium between content and language learning.

cultural differences as funds of knowledge, and How (seemingly) simple things can be very different (and difficult) in other places and cultures.

Research question

The pillars were developed for the work in linguistically and socio-culturally heterogeneous classrooms, not for teaching PSN in inclusive classrooms. Although we see a lot of similarities when working with PSN in an inclusive classroom, it is not clear if the three pillars are sufficient for preparing materials for CLIL lessons in classrooms where PSN are integrated. Our study presented on the poster focuses exactly on this question.

Results and discussion

In cooperation with practising teachers we observed CLIL lessons in inclusive classrooms and analysed materials prepared by teachers for PSN in their classes. In accordance with Karlíková's results (2020) we found that using CLIL with them based on appropriately designed materials is not an obstacle for majority of PSN that participated in our study. However, the three above mentioned pillars are not sufficient for creating a good CLIL material for PSN. It is not surprising that the fourth pillar, *Respecting PSN's individual differences*, must be added. For example for pupils with dyslexia it is good to shorten all texts, add colours and illustrative pictures. Considering the presence of different types of learners, a matching exercise may be text – text as well as text – picture. The materials should give enough opportunities for pair work and group work allowing each pupil use their strengths in collaborative activities.

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