Intercultural education: A challenge for bilingual programmes
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Abstract
The integration of the intercultural dimension within a bilingual approach has been discussed largely in the literature. The advantages, challenges and the opportunities that such integrated approach brings to international education are numerous, and the discussion is vibrant. This paper will review extensively the main concepts that define both approaches with the goal of identifying a common construct which leads towards the theoretical foundation of a joint methodology to intercultural and bilingual education. The main challenges of this approach will finally arise at the end of this paper.

Keywords: bilingual education, intercultural education, CLIL, challenges.

1. Introduction
The international support of relevant institutions to bilingual education is nowadays undisputed. We can find relevant examples of this in the official publications by the UNESCO (2003), OECD (2012), and the Council of Europe (2003). The importance and benefits of bilingual education are beyond question, and a number of scholars in the past decades have shown the evidence of cognitive (Casanova, 1995; Genesee, 1987; Zelasko & Antúnez, 2000; Bialystok, 2001; Castro, Ayankoya & Kasprzak, 2011; Jessner, 2008), socio-cultural (Brisk, 1999), linguistic (Cazden, Snow & Heise-Baigorria, 1990), and neurolinguistic (the Brainglot project, 2010); Rodríguez, Sanjuán, Fuentes, Ventura, Barrós & Ávila, 2014) advantages of bilingual education, as well as an improvement in job-access opportunities for bilingual employees (Schluessel, 2007; Tsung, 2009; Zelasko & Antúnez, 2000). Dual-language programmes, therefore, are gaining ground in many countries (e.g. U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 30), where national policies address the promotion of bilingual education. Therefore, the role of schools for the development of 21st century bilingual education is crucial, and a profound analysis is necessary. As Johnstone (2017, p. 109) said “I believe that schools represent the biggest challenge for successful bi-multilingual education, since there have been clear failures as well as successes.” The type of programme implemented, the second-language level of students and teachers, the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic areas, the funding received, the support of both national and international policies, as well as the methodology used across the curriculum - all these are chief variables within bilingual programs that need to be
scrutinized, and from which focused studies can be identified in the literature. For example, Mehisto & Asser (2007) interviewed parents, teachers and head-teachers; their evaluation also includes classroom observations, as well as the review of selected strategic school programs. Yang and Gosling (2014) measured the efficiency of bilingual programs by comparing students’ progress before and after bilingual programs. Muszynska (2014) did a comparison of public and private bilingual programs across four different countries in Europe (Italy, Spain, Poland and The Netherlands). Furthermore, internationalisation has been identified as a key factor in the literature (see a complete analysis in section no. 4 ‘Internationalisation and education’), as it can play an essential role regarding the socialization of students, their job prospects, the improvement of their linguistic skills (related to their second language use), and the enhancement of their intercultural competence.

This article will review the literature regarding some of these aspects from which emerging challenges will be drawn and discussed on the role of interculture within bilingual education.

2. Internationalisation and education

Internationalisation can be a key factor whose impact on education can be measured from different areas. Erasmus is one of the most renowned of these programmes, which was launched by the European Commission in 1987 and which has meant a big success for more than three million students (European Commission, 2014a, p. 4). Golubeva, Gómez & Espejo (2018) state:

The Programme has been carefully monitored not only by the European Commission (EC), higher educational decision-makers and internationalisation specialists, but also by researchers. The Erasmus phenomenon (together with its impact) has been studied by experts from different fields (sociologists, psychologists, economists, educational researchers, linguists and interculturalists), which offers a complementary view on the topic.

As its main benefits, the ESN Survey (2014) and the Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2014b) mentioned the following: experiencing personal challenge; experiencing international environment; improving language proficiency; developing transversal skills important to employers during an Erasmus period abroad; enhancing students’ career development; having more international life, and becoming more likely to live abroad in the future. Special attention to intercultural growth of transnational mobility can be found in the list of aims of a mobility program, one of which is: “[t]o raise participants’ awareness and understanding of other cultures and countries, offering them the opportunity to build networks of international contacts” (European Commission, 2015, p. 33).

Therefore, the impact of international programmes on education can be measured from different angles, being one of the most prominent that of the enhancement of the intercultural competence (both of students’ and teachers’). Pruegger and Rogers (1994) demonstrated that through education, training, traveling and intercultural experiences, individuals can improve their intercultural competence. Starting by higher education, a number of benefits can be identified. For example, Sawir (2011) conducted an analysis on the impact of the presence of international students in Australian higher education by examining teaching practice. It was interesting to see that whereas some of the academic staff reported that they made no adjustments to their teaching, others said that some purposeful changes were operated in their teaching in response to the presence of international students in their classrooms. Sawir (ibid.) concludes that:
Universities can no longer afford to carry a divided academic staff in which only some respond to cultural difference in an effective and conscious manner. A more coherent way of thinking and a more systematic and agreed strategy of teaching and learning is required if higher education institutions are to move forward in education for global citizenship (p. 392).

The enhancement of students’ intercultural competence after participation in international programs has been studied for some years now. Eisenchlas and Trevaskes (2007) explored practical ways in which the intercultural competence could be fostered among international programs that promote interaction among groups. Also, IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) was an Erasmus Multilateral Project developed between 2012 and 2015, which aimed at developing an intercultural path as “a set of teaching modules to be provided to Erasmus students before, during, and after their experience abroad, in order to encourage learning mobility and to support students in benefiting as much as possible from their international experiences in terms of personal growth and intercultural awareness.” (IEREST, 2015). The most relevant results of this project regarding internationalisation, mobility and the enhancement of intercultural competence among participants can be summarized as follows:

a. Respondents to the questionnaire confirm the findings of the literature review: that only a small group of mobile students prepare for their experience abroad by taking part in courses (with the exception of language courses) or other institutional activities.

b. When asked in the questionnaire to name what they think is essential for a successful stay abroad experience, students’ responses varied with the stage they were in: Students who were about to leave more strongly affirmed that success would heavily depend on social (‘having friends’) and academic (‘interesting courses’, ‘academic success’) factors, while students who had already returned tended to stress the importance of some personal qualities (‘openness’; ‘independence / courage’).

c. Some returning students mentioned the need to reflect on the intercultural experience; sometimes they also linked it to their willingness to act for change, generally by helping future mobile students or advising home institutions to better guide Erasmus students.

d. The main findings deriving from the teachers’ focus group concerned the specific objectives of intercultural preparation for mobile students. These were: (a) Increasing awareness and gaining a critical attitude on one’s own culture(s), as well as on other cultures; (b) Preparing for culture shock(s): general culture shock, academic culture shock, and language shock; (c) Bringing together foreign and local students; (d) Becoming more independent (IEREST, pp. 15-16).

The importance of these results springs from the fact that, firstly, the change that internationalisation operates on the improvement of students’ intercultural competence is demonstrated. Additionally, ‘mobile students’ acknowledge the importance of personal qualities that seem to be enhanced after mobility (openness, independence and courage) – see b. above. Finally, returning students reflect on their intercultural experience (see c. above), which is really interesting if we compare this with the fact that only a few students take preparation courses (see a. above), which supports the idea that prior to departure they do not see the need for doing this. So, as a general conclusion, it seems proved that internationalisation operates relevant positive changes on the enhancement of students’ intercultural competence. Also, interviewed teachers underlined the need to prepare students on, mainly, intercultural areas: awareness, critical attitude towards one’s and others’ culture, and culture shock.

The literature that analyses the impact of internationalisation on students from school programs (primary, secondary and vocational education mostly) is not as profuse as that focusing on higher education institutions (HEIs). Gordon (2001) takes SOCRATES as a case-study “to examine the effects,
outcomes and different impacts of European funding on schools in order to begin to draw out some of the criteria necessary for internationalising school education” (p. 408). This analysis is centred, mainly, on Comenius and Lingua (two specific sub-programmes which have been replaced by KA-1 in the new Erasmus+ 2020 Programme). The results indicate that:

SOCRATES has acted as a ‘window of opportunity’ for developing European activities in and with schools since the mid-1990s. The content was not too prescribed, which has allowed for a broad range of initiatives and themes. In many schools, it has certainly acted as a catalyst for developing European activities; a de facto internationalisation. In summary, the evaluators found a definite ‘feel good’ factor, with great enthusiasm on the part of the academic staff who report immediate outcomes. There would appear to be real impacts at local (individual and school) level: project materials, modules, teachers who have followed a course in a specific pedagogical area, etc. (Ibid., pp. 417-418).

Aguiar and Nogueira (2012) focus their research on private schools in high-income neighbourhoods in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. They base their study on the fact that parents invest increasingly on international programmes, as these are seen as a vital tool for their children’s success. The authors interviewed relevant staff (identified as responsible for the activities) and they encountered that internationalisation strategies were divided into three main categories:

(1) Emphasis on foreign language learning;
(2) Bilingualism as an educational project; and
(3) The promotion of international travel. (Ibid., p. 355)

It is interesting, then, to find data relating internationalisation to foreign language learning and bilingual education as two school strategies. Yemini and Fulop (2014) confirm these data on a study conducted in four schools in Israel. They interviewed some school principals and discussed their reasons to promote the internationalisation of their schools, stating that: “The motivation of these principals [...] involves providing a benefit and a competitive edge to the students by means of learning languages, participation in conferences and delegations and attaining various competencies.” (Ibid., p. 9). Therefore, the internationalisation of education is deeply connected to the learning and commandment of second languages, as well as to bilingual education.

García (2009, p. 38) defines bilingual education in the following way:

Bilingual education is different from traditional language education programs that teach a second or a foreign language. For the most part, these traditional second or foreign-language programs teach the language as a subject, whereas bilingual education programs use the language as a medium of instruction; that is, bilingual education programs teach content through an additional language other than the children’s home language.

Some years later, García and Lin (2017, p. 2) revisit the concept to make it holistic and comprehensive: “we adopt a definition of bilingual education as the use of diverse language practices to educate.”

The approach to bilingual education across Europe is CLIL, whose acronym stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. The precursors of this methodology can be found in widely known educational movements, such as those of bilingualism and total immersion in the United States and Canada. CLIL, as the official approach to bilingual education endorsed by the European Commission in 1994, is prevalent in many primary and secondary schools throughout Europe (Dalton-Puffer & Smit, 2007; Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010; Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010). The European
Commission (2012) states: “CLIL is taking place and has been found to be effective in all sectors of education from primary through to adult and higher education. Its success has been growing over the past 10 years and continues to do so.” [online, paragraph 1]. This approach involves learning subjects such as history, music or others through an additional language. It can be very successful in enhancing the learning of languages and other subjects, and developing in the youngsters a positive ‘can do’ attitude towards themselves as language learners (Marsh, 2000). Although there is not a widely-accepted definition of CLIL (Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter, 2014, p. 257), many scholars refer to the description of the approach offered by Marsh (1994): “CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focussed aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language”.

One of CLIL’s best-known precepts is the ‘4Cs framework’ (Coyle, 2008; then largely discussed by Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). The 4Cs is an acronym which stands for ‘cognition, communication, content and culture’. CLIL belongs to the ‘additive bilingualism’ programs and regarding cognition Cummins (2006) underlines that it is not necessary to command the L1 to introduce the L2, so the earlier this is included in the curriculum, the more possibilities of success it will bring. For Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010), CLIL matches very well the way our brain learns, as its cognitive bases are rooted on acquisition more than on enforced learning (Mackenzie, 2012). Therefore, we can say that CLIL practice promotes a more natural use of language in various contexts, which also leads to awareness of and tolerance towards other cultures, which promotes language as a process, and where thought is trained to acquisition. The synergy between bilingual and intercultural education, therefore, is the next natural step in the approach (Gómez, 2016).

3. The role of the intercultural dialogue in a new bilingual educational paradigm

The intrinsic relationship between language and culture constitutes the basis of any scientific discussion on bilingual and intercultural education (e.g., CLIL). Kramsch (1998) established this link clearly, and her seminal work stands nowadays as a reference within the specialized literature. Then, Byram (2012) moved forward when he confirmed the strong relationship between language and culture learning and teaching by concluding that: “…the impact on teaching and learning in practice by suggesting that, in the best cases, language and culture teaching produces, through the development of linguistic and intercultural competence, alternative conceptualisations of the world and contributes to the education / Bildung of the individual in society” (Ibid., p. 5).

The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education, published by the Council of Europe in 2001, affirms that: “This European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education aims to provide a set of principles and ideas for designing CLIL professional development curricula”. [p. 3]. As stated above, one of the four main axes of CLIL (culture) is almost overshadowed in a document whose aim is to be the primary reference for European CLIL teachers. Furthermore, and agreeing with the definition of intercultural competence by Byram, the intercultural axis of CLIL is still underdeveloped, as many researchers have already claimed (e.g., Griva & Kasvikis, 2014).

The inclusion of the intercultural axis within bilingual education entails the specific design of a construct whose main purpose should be to help students develop their intercultural competence. Its main goal is not ‘learning a second language’ and then ‘learning the second culture’. Instead, the main aim must be re-formulated as: ‘learning a second culture through the language that conveys it’.
It involves, then, the design of a combined approach where culture is placed at the very centre of learning, which articulates and vehicles contents. Gundara and Portera (2008) are convinced that:

In multi-lingual communities this necessitates the development of intercultural bilingual education to enable first languages of learners to be used to develop the learning of second and other languages. Multilingual educational contexts necessitate intercultural bilingual competences to enhance better communication across linguistic and national divides. In developing measures of multilingualism and non-centric curriculum, educational provision needs to become more accessible to larger number of students and lead to greater levels of equality in educational terms. (Ibid., p. 465)

One of the most outstanding strengths of this approach is the support that both bilingual and intercultural education receive from relevant international institutions such as UNESCO, OECD and the European Commission (as seen herein), which have already designed appropriate educational policies and specific plans. This constitutes a privileged situation that education has not frequently enjoyed throughout its long history, as well as a unique opportunity which undoubtedly needs to be taken. Furthermore, the strength of an integrated approach relies on the quality and the plethora of researchers, coming from different and complementary disciplines, who contribute to the enrichment of this approach with their data and ideas on how to improve it (research on the action). As an example, Meier (2010) examines social and intercultural benefits of bilingual or two-way immersion (TWI) schooling in the Staatliche Europa-Schule Berlin (SESB). Her findings suggest that these programmes can play a role in promoting social integration and group cohesiveness within schools and potentially in the wider society. The variety and complementarity of many researchers’ views can make the integration of bilingual and intercultural education real. We are convinced that such an approach is only possible if it emerges from the synergy of disciplines and methodologies, which will offer the necessary respect to the diversity of the world and its peoples.

The opportunities of bilingual and intercultural education also come from two different sources. On the one hand, an integrated approach must contribute to the social development of the individual, not forgetting their linguistic, academic or personal facets. Such social development must focus on the improvement of social capacities and abilities, empathy and, probably above all, the real experience of otherness. On the other hand, bilingual and intercultural education can help to improve employment opportunities of graduates in the international job market (Schluessel, 2007; Tsung, 2009; Zelasko & Antúnez, 2000), as many companies demand an intercultural and multilingual profile for the staff they hire, in addition to the competences which are specific to the job they will develop. Intercultural and multilingual competences can be gained through an integrated approach.

According to UNESCO (2012), the main principles underlying intercultural education address three main areas of the individual: a. Identity; b. Civic education; c. Social values towards respect. Moreover, UNESCO (2003) establishes the following principles for multilingual education:

[...] a set of guidelines which represent the organization’s current approach to language and education in the twenty-first century, and which should serve to state the position of the international community in its various member states. These guidelines are entirely based on a review of previous declarations and recommendations, and represent the diversity of thinking on this complex and challenging issue.

They are divided into three basic principles:

1. UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.
2. UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.

3. UNESCO supports language as an essential component of intercultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

Then, the major challenges of a joint approach to bilingual and intercultural education are, on the one hand, to arrive at a model which can offer each student the opportunity for integral development. Some plausible approaches can be mentioned here: CLIL, as well as the Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education published in 2009 by the Council of Europe. On the other hand, language teachers need specific training to develop their work in an intercultural school (Gómez & Raigón, 2009), because their “new role is that of intercultural mediator, not only among cultures in the class, but also between his/her own culture and the culture of the second language.” (Ibid., p. 53). This specific training will allow teachers to develop their own materials, set purposefully the intercultural goals of course syllabi and establish the most appropriate methodological strategies to help students enhance their intercultural competence. Aguado and Malik (2009) abound on the role of educational institutions regarding intercultural education: “interaction and communication become the focus for practice in educational institutions. However, higher education institutions tend to be conservative and hierarchical institutions that hardly move towards new beliefs and practices.” (Ibid., p. 201).

We will summarize the challenges of interculture within bilingual education by using the ‘4Cs framework’ of CLIL. This could be used as a general framework that offers the guidelines of a joint approach. These 4Cs will be adapted here to understand the challenges interculture (or culture as the centre of this model) must overcome to be implemented as the central axis of CLIL.

a. Culture is established as the centre of this approach. Every goal and aim of bilingual education must address the enhancement of students’ intercultural competence.

b. Communication should deal with the creation of new spaces where the exchange among individuals is regulated by otherness. This, to a great extent, depends on teachers’ planning and classroom organisation. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) put it like this:

   the ‘best’ teacher is neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, can help them acquire interest in and curiosity about ‘otherness’, and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people’s perspectives (p. 5).

c. Content should include the intercultural perspective. Some content subjects are more ‘easily’ adapted to this goal (e.g. Social Science in Primary Education: Gómez and Pérez, 2016), although the same authors have proved that almost every content in the curriculum can address interculture (e.g. Natural Science or Arts and Crafts).

d. Cognition, following Vygotsky (1978), should emerge from social interaction. Coyle (2005, p. 9) states: “The greatest challenge for CLIL teachers is to develop materials and tasks which are linguistically accessible whilst being cognitively demanding.” Therefore, cognition is seen as a construct which mediates between language and teaching methodology.

The accomplishment of this approach is clearly stated by Byram (2017):
I do not think that the cultural dimension is simply an ‘add-on’ or a ‘fifth skill’ as someone once called it. Neither is it a matter of learning information about another country as ‘background studies’ or ‘Landeskunde’ etc. which imply that the cultural dimension is indeed only an extra to be addressed when there is time, and that it is about ‘teaching culture’.

I think the cultural dimension needs to be integrated with the linguistic dimension as a whole – hence the attraction of the term ‘languaculture’. That would then mean that all the attention which has hitherto been focused on linguistic competence is also focused on intercultural competence, whether it is languaculture acquisition, vocabulary teaching, motivation and methods or whatever. This is a change which has not yet taken place and will take a long time although there are optimistic signs (Ibid., p. 276).

4. Final remarks

The challenges of intercultural education within a new approach to bilingual education are numerous, and its theoretical bases (as discussed herein) are complex. It is a vibrant discussion whose main goal must be the design of an integrated approach to bilingual and intercultural education. CLIL establishes the enhancement of students’ intercultural competence (being ‘culture’ one of the 4Cs) as one of its main precepts. The analysis of the literature herein has proved that the implementation of the intercultural axis within CLIL still needs research (e.g., Méndez, 2014 among others). According to Aguado and Malik (2009, p. 201), “The intercultural approach is one of the ways whereby one can understand the hybrid and complex reality of educational settings.” Therefore, if bilingual education is one of the most internationally accepted and supported approaches to education (UNESCO, OECD and Council of Europe, among others), and if interculture is an appropriate way to understand nowadays’ world, the combination seems to take us to a logical conclusion: schools must educate the citizens of the 21st century society to make them capable of preserving and respecting diversity and, above all, to encourage the development of citizens who respect such diversity as the only means towards personal growth. Following Johnstone (2017, p. 111):

There are enormous opportunities for CLIL and Multilingual/Intercultural Education to flourish in such contexts, from pre-primary education onwards. Sadly, however, globalisation can also be accompanied by highly negative features such as xenophobia, trafficking and many other forms of exploitation, terrorism, wars, population displacement, hacking, deliberate misinformation, indoctrination, neo-colonialism, environmental contamination (with multiple causation, including large amounts of air & road travel), global warming and distortion of universal human rights.

The above negative concomitants of globalisation can put considerable strain on the education of students at all levels, and of course multilingual and intercultural education must have an important role in confronting these challenges. Therefore, and as a general conclusion of this research, our view is that real and purposeful understanding among peoples could be achieved through the commandment of both the language and the culture of the other.
References


