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**ΤΙΤΛΟΣ ΔΙΠΛΩΜΑΤΙΚΗΣ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑΣ
“THE EFFECTS OF CLIL METHODOLOGY IN THE VERY YOUNG
LEARNERS’ ORAL PERFORMANCE”**

**ΟΝΟΜΑ ΦΟΙΤΗΤΡΙΑΣ:
ΜΑΡΙΝΑ ΑΡΓΥΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ**

**ΟΝΟΜΑ ΕΠΙΒΛΕΠΟΥΣΑΣ ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΡΙΑΣ:
ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΑ ΣΟΥΛΙΩΤΗ**

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Abstract

This research examines the integration of CLIL methodology into preschool education and analyses the effects that it may have on the very young learners' oral performance. It focuses on the specialty of teaching CLIL to very young learners, the challenges that teachers may face during the CLIL teaching process and whether it is possible for the teacher to help content and language develop at the same time. The study is addressed to very young learners aged five to six years old and it was conducted at I. M. Panagiotopoulos in Athens. The study lasted for two weeks and forty hours of CLIL lessons were observed. At the beginning, a conceptual framework of the key elements will be presented, these are the very young learners teaching situation, the CLIL methodology together with its methods and techniques and the teaching of oral skills. The researcher after describing the research design in detail, the research methodology as well as the materials she used, she will further analyse the results that came from the investigation. Finally, based on the results, the study tends to shed light to implications for future research on the field and for future applications on education.

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Introduction

The past four years I have been working in the pre-primary education in the private school I.M. Panagiotopoulos in Athens. As the need for foreign language learning and especially English language learning, becomes more crucial for working and studying in Greece and abroad, the school gives great emphasis on the field even from the very early age of the students in order to give them a variety of opportunities for further studies at the university. Having said that, it is remarkable to note here that English is the lingua franca of the world and has totally been integrated in our everyday lives. Especially young people, nowadays, are asked to learn and use the English language not only for language proficiency aims, that are achieved through exams but also for specific purposes like communication with other people, getting information from the Internet, or their entertainment. These needs raised the issue that English language learning should not be decontextualised but should be a part of a specific content in order for the students to comprehend and produce language for this specific content. For these reasons, and as young learners have the ability to absorb new knowledge easier than any other age group, the school decided to integrate the English language in the core programme from the pre-primary education.

Until some years ago, English teachers were rotating around the classes so the students were exposed to the English language some hours throughout the day. Later and until now, the core programme of the school became bilingual so the students have two teachers in the classroom at the same time, one Greek speaking and one English speaking. The way the lesson is conducted and the whole classroom environment seems like a family that has parents from two different nationalities and the child is asked to respond to both languages. As this turned to be very successful for the language level of the students as the years passed, the school, lately, felt confident to apply the CLIL methodology for the very young learners.

As it can be implied from Mattheoudakis (2017), in Greece implementing CLIL for pre-schoolers is still a pilot process. For this reason, many questions and issues were raised concerning the effectiveness of this innovative methodology. Is CLIL appropriate for very young learners? How may it affect the oral performance of the students? Can the level of content and language be adjusted to this age's needs and interests? How comfortable may young learners feel with only one foreign language teacher in the classroom? What can an English teacher do to make the lesson attractive and catchy for them? What challenges may an

English teacher face when teaching CLIL to students of other languages and how can they deal with a difficult situation? What can be very difficult in introducing new content in a foreign language when the students are not familiar with this vocabulary even in their mother tongue? How can one confirm that content and language can be developed together so that one does not surpass the other?

Based on these questions, I decided to conduct research in order to observe, examine and evaluate the effects of CLIL methodology in pre-primary education at the school where I work. There are three research questions that will be further investigated during the research. The first question is the effects of CLIL on the very young learners' oral performance. Secondly, I will examine the challenges that students and teachers may face during a CLIL lesson and thirdly, whether content and language are equally developed during the teaching process.

The thesis includes four sections. In the first section, I discuss the literature background of the research questions. More specifically, the main issues are the CLIL methodology, teaching young learners and teaching oral skills. In the second section, I describe the research context and participants, and the research design, the methodology and tools I use for the investigation. After that, I present and further analyse the results of the research based on the outcomes from the research tools. In the last section, I also discuss the implications that appear from the research results as well as the limitations that may have caused hinders to the investigation process and a general conclusion on the thesis.

1.Literature Review

The aim of this section is to present the literature review of the topic, that is the theoretical background of the investigation the researcher is going to conduct. The literature review is divided in four different subsections according to the focus of the research. More specifically, the topics that will be discussed are the very young learners in the language class, the CLIL methodology, the oral skills as well as research that has already been conducted on this field.

1.1Very young learners in the language class

The first subsection to be discussed is the very young learners. The researcher will describe their characteristics as well as the methodologies used for teaching this age group.

1.1.1Definition and characteristics of very young learners

Young learners and more specifically very young learners, aged 3 to 6 years old, are a very special group of students and even more challenging for foreign language teachers. At this age, children experience for the first time what it is to leave their home and family and become part of another society, the school. “At these ages, they are naturally curious and enthusiastic to explore the world around them. Most children are eager to gain new experiences including learning a new language. “They like to be active and have a lot of energy which make preschool perfect time to benefit from physical activities to teach a language.” (Degirmenci Uysal,, Yavuz, 2015, p.19) Children’s main objective at this age is to experience and discover things about the world around them through their senses. This means that according to their environment they create their own world. They gain knowledge, comprehend and respond to the stimuli around them based on their senses. According to Piaget, children acquire knowledge through physical interaction with the environment. (Buniol, Zouganeli, 2004) They belong to the so-called pre-operational stage where they cannot yet think abstractly or through somebody else’s perspective.

Social interaction is also of great importance for them according to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. They become extremely enthusiastic when it comes to sharing their experiences and talking about their background through language. That is why, language and communication play an essential role in the learning process. (Buniol, Zouganeli, 2004) Oral interaction plays a remarkable role for this age group as they are not yet aware of reading and writing.

1.1.2. Teaching very young learners

To start with, foreign language teaching at a very young age has many beneficial outcomes. Surveys have shown that the very young learners are in the most productive age so as to accumulate new knowledge. As it is argued in Lojova (2006) the sooner the learners start being exposed to a new language, the better the results of the language proficiency they will have. (Lojova, 2006:45)

As mentioned in the previous section, in Greece, very young learners are not yet capable of reading and writing. Therefore, the teaching process that is addressed to this age should be designed by the teachers and curriculum designers in order to focus on oral skills, that is listening and speaking.

Taking into consideration the above statement, it is crucial to remember that communication is the medium through which the learners can understand and explore the world around them as well as express their experiences and feelings. Secondly, this age group can only conceive new knowledge in a specific context and through their daily routines and not abstract vocabulary and terms. These conditions become even more important when it comes to foreign language teaching where the target language is not spoken in their natural environment. Routines play a crucial role in the classroom environment, facilitate the teacher's role and make the students feel more comfortable. "The context and the familiarity of the event provide an opportunity for pupils to predict meaning and intention, but the routine also offers a way to add variation and novelty that can involve more complex language." (Cameron, 2001: 10)

Furthermore, this age group has very different needs and aims than any other as the skills that are to be achieved by the age of five or six have to do with their autonomy, their gross or fine motor skills or their social integration in the class team. For example, very young learners need to learn how to sit on a chair properly in the classroom or hold their markers and pencils properly to draw and write respectively. They should also remember classroom rules like raising their hand before they speak and listen to their teacher and peers without interrupting them. Reflecting on the above, the methodologies and techniques that are used for them can facilitate these special objectives in order to achieve better results in teaching a foreign language together with reaching the skills that are addressed to this age group. One of the most effective and common techniques that teachers use for this age group is the role-play. "Childish

games of 'let's pretend' help children to rehearse for the real world and give them an opportunity to try out situations in order to learn to cope with them." (Reilly, Ward, 1997: 8)

Something that decision makers take into account when designing the curriculum and the syllabus is that receptive skills in this case listening come before productive skills in this case speaking. "Receptive skills mostly precede productive skills and grammar in L2 acquisition as grammar needs to be cognitively ready" (Cameron, 2001 as cited in Degirmenci Uysal., Yavuz, 2015:21). This means that the activities need to be in a specific chronological order that will allow learners first to expose themselves to the target language through the listening skill and then to have the opportunity to express themselves through the speaking skill. Here it is the teachers' role to find out or design activities that provide stimuli for further oral communication as writing is not yet a way of expression for them.

Learners also need to get involved in hands-on activities as they do not have the capacity to stay concentrated on somebody else talking for a long time. An effective way to do so is to make use of their imagination and energy in games, songs, drawing pictures or puzzle-like activities as children are creative and want to be active participants in an interesting lesson.

In addition, having in mind that learners of this age have a very short attention span makes it important for the teachers to come up with a variety of different activities that can get the attention of the learners. Teachers should not forget to change the activities every ten to fifteen minutes so the students remain concentrated on the lesson. "It is very difficult to hold the attention of a whole group of small children and the best way to do it is to ring the changes every five to ten minutes." (Reily and Ward, 1997:7) Together with the fact that in such an early age students get bored much easier, the role of the teacher in adjusting the lesson to the learners' needs is again vital. The lesson should be motivational enough so as to encourage the learners to participate, take initiatives, express themselves and have fun without even realising that at this moment they are part of the learning process in a formal classroom environment. "It is vital to remember that the children are very young and that we are aiming to make their first exposure to English an enjoyable one." (Reily and M. Ward, 1997, p.14)

A very widely spread and common methodology used for very young learners is the Total Physical Response (TPR). It can be applied in the learners' everyday life by giving them simple orders and instructions to follow like "Put on your jacket" or "Go to wash your hands". However, it can also be used in the classroom environment aiming at keeping the students

active and energetic so they do not get bored or absent-minded. Singing song, acting out stories, symbolic games, dancing or playing movement games are some very creative ideas for teaching new vocabulary to very young learners. Total Physical Response is a methodology that allows teachers to incorporate the target language into everyday activities and routines that learners can follow. In other words, in methodologies like Total Physical Response the term language learning can be substituted by language acquisition. “Language is not learned by the child, it is created.” (Villiers and Villiers, 1978, p. 3) In this case acquisition seems to be an unconscious procedure (DeKeyser, 1990) that can be present even outside the formal classroom. TPR is one of the most famous and effective methodologies that can confirm that the students will learn without learning and will respond to the foreign language for communicational purposes.

Moreover, the past few years there is another teaching methodology that has appeared in the foreign language teaching environment that is considered to combine many features of the principles of effective second language acquisition (SLA) and at the same time fulfils the needs of the learners. This is the so called CLIL methodology, that is Content and Language Integrated Learning, and it is to be further discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

1.2 CLIL

The section that follows is about the CLIL methodology that has been applied in education the past few years. It is a dual educational approach in which content and language must be combined. “This approach introduces a new cognitive dimension by the addition of a new competence other language learning approaches: using the language to learn.” (Sánchez Pérez and Salaberri Ramiro, 2018:7) In this section what is going to be analysed is what CLIL is about, how it is applied in the second language acquisition process as well as the methodologies and techniques used. Any challenges or limitations that teachers may encounter when teaching with CLIL will also be presented and discussed.

1.2.1 Definition

CLIL is a methodology used in foreign language teaching and stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. The definition and the aims of the term have been under debate for years by the researchers. In Cenoz et al. (2014: 244) Coyle et al. (2010: 1) argued that ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language’. In the same article, other researchers like Dalton-Puffer (2007), Mehisto (2008) and Pe´rez-Vidal and

Juan-Garau (2010) claimed that we cannot talk about total balance in the dual role of content and language. There was also a disagreement on whether CLIL is used as the medium of instruction and includes actual techniques and practices or as an “innovative educational methodology” that includes “isolated lessons or activities conducted in an additional language”. Cenoz et al. (2014: 245)

Through the years, many definitions have been given to this term according to where the focus was put on by the researchers or the teachers that used it. “The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was originally defined in 1994, and launched in 1996 by UNICOM, University of Jyväskylä and the European Platform for Dutch Education, to describe educational methods where ‘subjects are taught through a foreign language with dual-focussed aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language’.” (Darn, 2006: 2) Other definitions talked about ‘language across curriculum’ or language supported subject learning’ (Darn, 2006) were not adopted as they were not relevant with the actual aim of the methodology. As Berton (2008, p.143) claims “During the last decade, it has become increasingly commonplace in many European schools to use a foreign language as a vehicle to teach and learn non-language content.” In other words, the language that is used is not the mother tongue of the students, the foreign language acquisition is emphasised while being integrated into the broad curriculum and for this reason increased motivation is needed in the teaching process. (Darn, 2006) “Broadly speaking, CLIL provides a practical and sensible approach to both content and language learning whilst also improving intercultural understanding, and has now been adopted as a generic term covering a number of similar approaches to bilingual education in diverse educational contexts.” (Darn, 2006: 2)

First of all, CLIL focuses on content together with language. More specifically, unlike other teaching methodologies, language is not the only aim of the lesson but the means through which the learners can communicate about various topics that are dealt with within the classroom environment during the lesson. The past few years this has become a commonplace in many European schools that teach many school subjects like Biology, Maths, History, Sports, Art, Science in the foreign language. “Knowledge of the language is not the aim but the means of acquiring knowledge about the subject content. A foreign language is offered as a tool, and the students can put into practice the principle of ‘learning by doing’.” (Berton, 2008:143) Learners are not taught decontextualised language terms that need to remember and reproduce. Instead, they discuss, together with their teachers and their peers topics that take place in their world or

that are interested in finding out more about. In this way, the foreign language takes a purposeful meaning and the learners get to use it more without realising it.

Also, CLIL gives opportunities for discussion about real-life situations. “In addition, important and interesting content gives students a meaningful basis for understanding and acquiring new language structures and patterns.” (Berton, 2008, p.143) The way of acquiring and using the target language becomes naturalistic and emphasis is given more on fluency than on accuracy. It should be mentioned here, though, the fact that it is very important to keep the balance between content and language as both of them should notice gradual progress throughout the year. Here, the role of the teacher becomes crucial one more time.

1.2.2 Methodology and techniques

According to Coyle (2005), there are four principles that form the CLIL methodology, that is content, communication, cognition and culture. Content refers to the subject that is to be taught and the level of knowledge that students have. Communication refers to the fact language is used for learning and aim is on fluency and social interaction. Cognition aims at allowing the learners to construct their own knowledge and understanding of the content. Culture refers to self and other awareness especially in a multicultural world where respect and tolerance are essential.

CLIL employs a tool that can observe the language awareness and that is the Language Triptych (Martin del Pozo, 2016). Language Triptych has three components that combine content and language learning together. More specifically, there is language of learning, that is “language needed to access concepts and skills of a field of knowledge”, language for learning, that is “language that enables the learner to be functional in a foreign language environment” and language through learning, that is the language generated in the process of learning”. (Martin del Pozo, 2016: 144).

One of the most important aspects that make CLIL distinguish from others is the fact that it enables the development of content and language at the same time in the classroom. “The advantages of such an approach are numerous, amongst which we could highlight the belief that learners will develop linguistic and communicative competences by using language as a tool in a natural and innovative way.” (Berton, 2008, 143) Language is not used as the primary goal but as a tool to facilitate content presentation, comprehension and production. The students

come in contact with different types of content and at the same time become familiar with the appropriate vocabulary in the target language.

In addition, in a CLIL class the role of the teacher is very different. The lesson is no longer teacher-centred and the students have a more dominant role. In other words, the learners are asked to participate more and contribute in their own way. “..the communicative approach and student-centred learning are the best ways for creating a favourable educational setting for learning.” (Menegale, 2008, p.107) Students are actively involved in the teaching process. They are asked to take initiatives, express themselves, express their own opinions and beliefs and interact with the rest of the class. Teachers are not the authority anymore and the technique of questioning is now used “not only as a means to promoting learning in CLIL contexts but also as a means to enhancing students’ participation and, as a result, their oral production.” (Menegale, 2008, p.107) Questioning gives the opportunity to the teachers to make the lesson more attractive and engaging for the learners. It aims at broadening the learners’ horizons and getting the learners to practise their critical thinking skills. In other traditional classes the conversation was guided by the teacher, the questions needed an one-word answer and the answers had only a drilling purpose “when students are required to interact, it is usually to give predetermined answers to some (often insignificant) display questions.” (Menegale, 2008, p.105) According to Menegale (2008) the most appropriate and effective kind of questions for the CLIL methodology is the referential questions. When teaching through referential questions the teacher is not aware of the answer and they try to personalise the questions to listen to the students’ opinions and refer them to the students’ needs. Taking into consideration that the main objective of the CLIL methodology is fluency and communication, Lynch (1996) as cited in (Menegale, 2008:110) claims that “only with referential questions can students practice initiating interactions.”

Teachers tend to use a variety of techniques in a CLIL lesson in order for the objectives to be achieved and to make the lesson engaging and attractive. First of all, in a mixed ability class where most of the students have different ways of learning, the integration of skills is very commonly used. Teachers use more than one skill during the lesson so they can make the content and language as comprehensible as possible.

Another very popular technique is the use of ICT. Provided that nowadays young people are very familiar with technology, the idea of integrate ICT in the lesson can encourage the learners

to participate more. Through ICT CLIL students can look for information about a specific content, facilitate the understanding of difficult vocabulary with the help of visual aids, practise their skills or listen to authentic discourse.

Moreover, in a CLIL learning environment students learn by doing and they have an active role in the process. So, teachers assign tasks to the students during guided or freer practice. Willis (1996:23) defines a task as an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. (Berton, 2008:145) With respect to the principles of CLIL, Willis' definition of task fits the issues of CLIL, in which the goal is to achieve knowledge, skills and understanding in a specific discipline. (Berton, 2008:146) The tasks in a CLIL classroom also promote the concept of social interaction and group work which seem to be very essential educational goals. That is because when a teacher assigns a task, they have the students do it either in groups or in pairs. In this way, the learners can cooperate and exchange information, ideas, experiences and opinions.

Furthermore, in CLIL methodology teachers usually use the concept of scaffolding. More specifically, teachers try to build on the learners' prior knowledge in order to expose them to new content and new language. New information is connected to students' background and experience, and strategies are used to scaffold the students' acquisition of knowledge and skills towards a progressive autonomy (Barbero et al. 2009 as cited in Sánchez Pérez and Salaberri Ramiro, 2018, p.9).

1.2.3 Challenges and limitations when teaching CLIL to very young learners

CLIL Methodology is proved to be effective for both the development of content and language level of the learners. However, there are some challenges that teachers may face according to the age and the level they teach.

CLIL is not yet applied to the majority of English classes in Greece and this implies that all foreign language teachers are not adequately trained and educated to adopt the methods and techniques of CLIL. "Teachers need to analyse and personalise the CLIL context" (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 52 as cited in Ravelo, 2014:77) in order to be able to have the expected outcomes on learners' performance. The need for teacher training is more urgent nowadays as due to CLIL where "the language becomes an instrument that allows for the transmission of the content [...] the role of the language teacher has evolved, not deteriorated." (Ravelo, 2014:77)

What's more, language teachers need to spend more time in studying about the content they are going to present, choosing the vocabulary, collecting the appropriate resources and preparing the appropriate activities and tasks. They need to cooperate with content teachers and exchange skills and experiences in order to implement CLIL in a foreign language class. (Ravelo, 2014) This process becomes even more difficult when the teachers are not provided with the appropriate CLIL resources and materials. As Vazquez (2007: 10) states CLIL materials can not only be books but also “posters, caricatures, photographs, diagrams, schemas, tables, graphics etc. from authentic sources”.

Teachers should also be aware of content and language equal development in a CLIL class so they can give emphasis on what is to be assessed. Even though language is seen in CLIL as a means for transmission of content and not as the only objective, teachers should correct mistakes in both areas when they hinder communication or meaning. (Ravelo, 2014)

Personally speaking, CLIL may have limitations to the students, as well, especially when the lesson is addressed to very young learners as they are a very special group. Being unaware of the new language may hinder their willingness to participate in the lesson. The teacher's role here is crucial in order to make the lesson engaging for them and adjust the level to the learners' skills and present the new content in a way that facilitates the comprehension and production trying not to use the learners' L1.

1.3 Oral skills

The following chapter is about to examine the oral skills. When talking about oral skills, educators mean listening and speaking skills. After defining what oral skills include, there will be a discussion about how oral skills are taught to very young learners in a foreign language classroom. Finally, it is worthy analysing how the CLIL methodology can affect the teaching of oral skills.

1.3.1 Defining oral skills

The research that is to be conducted will focus on oral skills and especially on the learners' oral performance. So, the skills that will most involved in the research is listening and speaking. Listening includes listening to excerpts from a book or from authentic materials like videos, news, interviews or dialogues. It may also be a story or a song depending on the age of the students. Students are usually asked to conceive the general idea of what they hear and

complete a task that is different according to their level. Speaking includes interaction with peers or the teacher about the learners' interests or daily life. It may also include having the learners to take roles in order to have a dialogue with their peers about a specific topic, find a solution to a problem or make recommendations. Learners can also talk on their own if asked by the teachers to express their opinion and ideas about an issue. In the section that follows the teaching of oral skills will be further analysed and especially how CLIL can contribute to the oral skills improvement.

1.3.2 Teaching oral skills to very young learners

When teaching oral skills, teachers must take into account that productive skills follow receptive skills and that they are interrelated. In oral skills' case, students will first be exposed to language in order to practice listening skills and then they will practice their speaking skills like it is seen in PPP approach presented by Criado (2013).

During the lesson, there are specific steps that should be followed in order to reach the expected outcome. To start with, the lesson needs to start with a warm up activity so as for the teacher to introduce the topic and activate the learners' background knowledge. The listening skills will be practised through a visual resource like a story for this special age group, either from a book or from the screen, as they are not yet able to listen to excerpts that are not followed by visual aids. It is also very important that the students have a purpose for listening a story so they can practise their concentration skills as well. The language focus will be further practised in the activities that follow as the students will be asked to answer questions in order to drill specific words or phrases. The teacher "checks his/her students' correct understanding of the items presented in the first stage. These activities are aimed at achieving accuracy of forms so that fluency can be later achieved in production activities." (Criado, 2013:99) At this point of the lesson, the objective goes on to the speaking skills. The role of the teacher here is that of guide and coordinator so as to help them with the form and the pronunciation of the new language focus. During guided practice, the teacher makes questions on the story and tries to encourage the students to talk in the target language. After that, the teacher elicits students' personal experiences in follow-up activities and "autonomous and more creative activities" (Criado, 2013:100) so they can use the language focus on their own for role play, problem-solving or expressing their opinions etc. "Success in language learning is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language." (Delliou, Zafiri, 2016:48)

Teachers should have in mind that during speaking skills practice young learners do not have the critical thinking to express their point of view on a specific topic nor have a long dialogue with their friends. Oral production starts with one or two words and gradually, through the method of scaffolding, students start forming sentences. Needless to say, that the younger the learners are the less encouraged they are to talk in the target language. So, the chances given to them in order to talk have to be based on their interests and situations they experience in their daily life. Some characteristic examples of these are their daily routines, their feelings and their favourite things. In addition, after watching a story or reading a book it is very helpful to elicit information by making concept-checking questions. Some examples of these can be saying their favourite part of the story, their favourite character, what happened at the end of the story, or what they would do if they were in the hero's place.

1.3.3 CLIL and the teaching of oral skills

In a CLIL class, the target language is “not used only to offer knowledge, but also to convey meaning and share experience.” (Delliou, Zafiri, 2016:48) Especially in young learners in the Greek environment, this can be done only through speaking as this age group is not ready yet to read and write.

CLIL methodology plays an essential role in young learners' oral production as it encourages them to talk about content that are interested in and language can be contextualised in various ways that allow teachers to introduce new language as if it was the learners' mother tongue that the students are used to. As Littlewood (1981) argues in Hosni (2014, p.24) “The development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have the motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and relate with the people around them”.

When practising oral skills in a CLIL environment it is very important not to use the student's mother tongue, though. Instead, the teacher can use their background knowledge in order to elicit the new content and present the vocabulary in the target language as this proves to be more beneficial.

Furthermore, integration of skills is of great importance in CLIL methodology as learners need to receive and comprehend language before they produce it. What matters though is not the quantity but the quality of exposure. (Gallardo del Puerto, Lacabex, 2017) That is why exposure to authentic resources can be very effective for correct language production. “Pronunciation

may not benefit from contexts in which instructors are not native speakers of the target language”. (Gallardo del Puerto, Lacabex, 2017:36)

Finally, in my CLIL teaching environment, the acquiring of a language and the oral skills improvement goes beyond the time of the lesson as the teacher talks in the target language not only during the activities but throughout the school day. CLIL is not only about conducting lessons in the target language but also adjusting all the daily routines in chances for introducing new input and eliciting new output. The students have the opportunity to communicate in the target language for their routines and personal needs like asking for toilet, water, food.

For CLIL teachers and learners, fluency and communication are the main aims of the teaching process. Generally speaking, “CLIL methodology is likely to promote classroom talk and more communicative-oriented tasks than traditional language lessons” (Llinares, Morton and Whittaker 2012 as cited in Gallardo del Puerto, Lacabex, 2017:37).

1.4 Research on the field

As CLIL is a very well-known methodology in nowadays education system, many researches have already been undertaken and many schools have started practising it in the language classrooms. Below there are some examples and the results of the students’ oral performance after being exposure in the CLIL context.

During a case study at an experimental school in Greece (Matthaeoudakis, 2017), the teachers expressed their opinion on this new methodology and talked about the challenges they may meet during the lesson. According to the teachers’ perceptions on CLIL, it is very important that the educators are adequately trained on the content they are asked to teach as this may be a barrier during the teaching process. They should also be provided with the appropriate materials. Another limitation for some of them is also the time needed, as it takes more time to introduce concepts that students have never heard before even in their mother tongue. This barrier brings to light one more challenge that foreign language teachers face and that is the fact that due to unawareness of the vocabulary in the foreign language, the students are sometimes unwilling to participate and teachers either try to repeat and revise key words or end up using L1 in the classroom.

Apart from Greece, CLIL had been applied to other schools in other countries around the world like Spain but was addressed to higher grades. Even though the results did not refer to very young learners, it can be proved how effective the CLIL environment was for the students that attended the program. In a Spanish school (Ruiz de Zarobe and Lazagabaster, 2010) it was shown that communicative competence was successfully improved as CLIL students had more exposure to the target language than non-CLIL ones. Moreover, in Catalonia research showed that CLIL students had the same or even better oral and written performance than non-CLIL students of higher grades.

Furthermore, in an American school CLIL programmes proved that students have the opportunity to interact more in the lesson rather than being passive learners. “CLIL classroom seems to offer good opportunities for students to practise ways of conducting social interaction in English. [...] Consequently, students in CLIL classroom are left with more space to act as interactional participants. This is potentially an empowering experience, especially when compared to other institutional contexts of foreign language learning such as EFL classrooms, in which discourse practices tend to be more teacher-centred.” (Dalton-Puffer et al. 2010, p.119)

2. Research design

The following chapter is going to deal with the research design. More specifically, the environment where the research is going to take place will be presented as well as the teachers that will take part in the research. In addition, the research methodology as well as the data collection tools will be analysed.

2.1 Description of the research environment

The research will take place in a private pre-primary school in Athens. The children that will be observed are very young learners, that is two groups of pre-primary 1 aged four to five years old and three groups of pre-primary 2 aged five to six years old. Each group has about twenty-four students. Their mother tongue is Greek and the majority of them come from Greek families. Very few of them come from a bilingual family environment and they are fluent in both the Greek and the English language. Moreover, almost half of the students have been exposed to the English language in a bilingual school environment for three years. There is only a small percentage of students that did not have any contact with the English language until this school year. From all the above it can be inferred that there is a difference in the language level of the students and this can be a challenge for the educators or can sometimes be a hinder during the teaching process.

In the beginning, the researcher will refer to the general curriculum that the school follows. The school works through a bilingual program that allows to two teachers to be in the classroom at the same time. So, there is one Greek and one English teacher that are in the classroom at the same time. Both teachers have the same important role during the teaching process and the two languages are practised equally based on the needs of each, that is Greek or English. Both the curricula of Greek and English schools are followed so both languages can be developed. More specifically, there is a combination of the objectives that need to be achieved by the end of the year in both languages and the educators work on them in an equivalent way through cross-curricular activities. Every week there is a specific content that is discussed in the classroom through different learning areas like Language, Maths, Science, STEM, Art and Craft, Sports and Music. The Greek teacher' role is not to translate the English one or vice versa. Instead, through the activities the teachers work together as one each with their own language and their own aims. The students are used to respond to and communicate with the two teachers in both languages. This may cause a problem at the beginning of the year

especially for the students that come from a different school environment or who have been less exposed to the target language and so, they find it difficult to comprehend their English teacher and seem more reluctant to use the English language. So as to facilitate this situation and provided that the school environment is fully bilingual, the English teachers talk to the students in English during the whole school day, when they eat and play, and not only during the teaching process. The children need to communicate all their needs when talking to their English teacher, like when they need to play, eat, sleep, drink water or go to the toilet. The main aim of this bilingual program is fluency. The learners need to be able to communicate in the target language. Any mistakes that may occur during talking are dealt with appropriate error correction techniques depending on the level of each student and whether they hinder the communication or not.

The research will be conducted during a specific hour of the day where all English teachers teach a subject of their own without the presence of a Greek teacher. This hour is the CLIL hour of the day where each of the teachers have chosen a specific subject area to work on through the target language. The aim of the CLIL hour is for the young learners to become more familiar with the target language, to feel more comfortable in an only English language environment and to get encouraged to use the target language not like all the other school subjects but for a purpose and a reason in a specific context. The subjects chosen during CLIL are Phonology, STEM, Self-expression games and Problem Solving. Most of the times, the content of the lesson is based on the topic that is discussed during the core program every week. The aims of each subject are related to the curriculum but this time they are practised only in the target language.

From the above it can be inferred that the CLIL curriculum is partial in this school as it is not followed during the whole school day but it is applied in the teaching process only an hour per day. The teachers rotate in the classrooms every day as each one has their own subject. The duration of the research will be two weeks so in total there will be forty hours of observation.

2.2 Research methodology

In the above research environment, the research will last two weeks and its aim is to answer some research questions regarding the CLIL methodology. To start with, through the research it will be proved whether the CLIL methodology is effective for the very young learners' oral performance at the school where the research will be conducted. Secondly, it will be discussed

whether the content and the language are developed successfully at the same time and at the same level and that none of them surpasses the other during the lesson. Finally, all the challenges that the four research participants face when teaching CLIL will be discovered and analysed. The researcher expects to find out how the four teachers deal with these challenges and what techniques they use in order to facilitate the teaching process and have a productive lesson.

All the research questions refer to elements that can only be examined during the teaching process. They cannot be answered without research that can examine and evaluate the very young learners' performance in action while they are in the classroom. So, the young learners that are the protagonists of the research need to be observed as a whole and individually at the same time. The teachers, that are the participants of the research should be impartial and objective. What needs to be assessed as well is whether the pedagogical methodology presented has the expected outcome on the students, what challenges appear during the teaching process and how the situation can be improved for the educators as well as for the learners. In order for the last objective to be achieved the researcher will have to reflect on the results of the research. The teaching process is an on-going process that changes every day as the needs of the students may vary and each lesson is unique. Generally, teachers many times face unexpected situations and need to alter their aims or their techniques. What's more, the students may one day fully participate in the lesson and another day be totally indifferent or have difficulties in comprehending the content. That is why the research approach that the researcher chose to use is the Action Research. According to Clark et al. (2020) action research aims at enabling educators to reflect on and improve their pedagogical practices. Action research allows the researcher to collect data through practice in a specific context. The findings are also on-going and not absolute depending on the research context.

The questions of the research are many and they need to be examined separately as well as in relation to each other in a natural setting. The questions of the research are the CLIL Methodology, the young learners teaching situation and the teaching of the oral skills. These three research questions interrelate and affect one another. First and foremost, the research questions have to be described and examined each on their own. The researcher needs to assess the effectiveness of each of them and whether they are affected by other factors. More specifically, the researcher needs to evaluate the CLIL methodology in a natural classroom environment, how the educators deal with it and what influences its effectiveness. Moreover,

what needs to be taken into account is what challenges the teachers and students face during the teaching process in a CLIL class. Finally, provided that the CLIL methodology promotes the simultaneous development of content and language, the researcher needs to make sure that these two research questions have the same level of difficulty and develop in the same pace.

The researcher does not only want to collect samples of what techniques the educators use to conduct their lesson in a CLIL context and or whether the methodology examined is effective. The researcher also needs to find out the reasons why this methodology is considered to be more productive and effective than the others and reflect in detail on the opinion of the people who apply this methodology in a group of very young learners. At this point, the researcher will work inductively by drawing more general conclusions from the data they will have collected. For this purpose, the qualitative research is the most appropriate because, as Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 96) state, “qualitative researchers work [...] by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information.” In other words, the researcher needs the qualitative research questions because she is not only interested in examining the results after each lesson but also in making more general conclusions about the methodology and how it affects students in the long term.

Furthermore, the qualitative research is beneficial as the researcher needs to evaluate CLIL in a real classroom environment during the teaching process. In this way the teachers as well as the students will be in a natural context and will be able to behave and react spontaneously without limitations. The participants of the research need to “behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research.” Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 96)

2.3 Participants of the research

The participants of the research will be four female English teachers. All of them take part in the bilingual program of the school during the core program and are experienced in teaching English to very young learners and in teaching CLIL in the classroom environment. One of them is bilingual as she is Canadian and Greek but she has been working in Greek private schools for many years. The other teachers are all Greek but have studied on teaching English to speakers of other languages in Greek universities and organisations like the British Council and have worked for Greek schools for many years. One of these teachers has also lived in England and has worked in English schools in pre-primary education.

The educators will be the ones who will observe the groups of students they teach CLIL to during the week. They will be asked to complete a checklist every day for two weeks in order to find out whether the CLIL methodology and its application in the classroom environment are effective for the very young learners' oral performance.

2.4 Data collection methods

“Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants.” Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 96) The researcher will also use the participants as the key instrument to collect the data and analyse them. Two different data collection tools will be used in order to conduct the qualitative research. Each of the tools has its own purposes, its own structure and different elements that aims to examine.

To start with, the first tool, the observation list, will include questions that will deal with the three research questions. More specifically, the list will be divided in three sections, one for each research question. One section will be about how effective the teaching of CLIL methodology is for the very young learners' oral performance, the second section will be about the balance between content and language development and the third one will be about the challenges that the educators or students may face when teaching CLIL. Though the observation list is more often used in quantitative types of research, this list will include questions that refer to qualitative methodology. Some of the questions are closed and can be answered with yes or no and in some others the participants have to check one of the two possible answers. There are also two questions where the teacher needs to rank the answers. Also, a few questions are open-ended and teachers can “freely provide their views.” Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 98) Each of the sections does not include more than nine questions. The observation list will be completed by the participants once a day after the CLIL lesson every day. As it happens to many qualitative researches, (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018) the researcher will be engaged in the process as she is one of the CLIL teachers.

The researcher chose to use an observation list because he wanted to inspect the teaching situation from the perspective of the teachers as they happen to have a complete point of view of how the lesson gets going in a CLIL environment, the preparation that is needed for a CLIL lesson, how the students accept or not this different learning process and the results that appear from the way they respond in this methodology during the lesson. Besides, the researcher wants to investigate the CLIL techniques the teachers use during the lesson to enhance the oral

performance, the resources that make the presentation of the new language and content easier as well as how they deal with any difficulties that may appear in terms of either the content or the language presentation. Moreover, one of the most important and challenging things in CLIL that needs to be assessed is how the teachers try to keep a balance between the content and the language development, what the possible ways to do so are in order for the former not to surpass the latter and the appropriateness of content and language for the students' age and interests.

For all the above reasons, the researcher chose to use the observation list because it can combine and group all the above elements that are included in the teaching process. The benefits of the observation list are various. First and foremost, as Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) argue, during an observation there is the chance to examine how things take place during real time and even notice unexpected incidents that may appear during the lesson. In addition, the researcher will also be one of the participants, so she will have a better view of advantages and/or disadvantages of CLIL methodology when applied in the classroom. The results of this assessment will be deductive and objective. In other words, the participants will answer questions that will be designed in a way so that the outcomes are descriptive. The samples of the research will help the researcher to draw an objective conclusion. "Probability sampling is the most statistically valid option, but it's often difficult to achieve unless you're dealing with a very small and accessible population." (McCombes, 2021)

Qualitative researchers also use interviews to collect data. "These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants." Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 98) So, apart from the observation list, the researcher will also use an interview in order to take the information she needs. The interview will be structured according to the research questions and will include eight questions that will refer to the equivalent research questions. The participants will be asked to present the reasons why they believe in the effectiveness of the CLIL methodology compared to other teaching methodologies and which techniques encourage the students to use the target language so that they enhance their oral performance. What's more, the educators will reflect on the difficulties that a CLIL teacher may come across or the ones they may have experienced and the ways they faced them.

The interview will take place at school during the teachers' break and the four participants will be interviewed separately. That is because the researcher needs to give time to the participants

to think in depth, reflect on their experience and their work and express in their own words their point of view thoroughly. The interview also allows the researcher to create a holistic view of the issue and the participants not only to answer questions but to talk about any limitations that may exist or about further suggestions and progress in the future. As a tool of a qualitative research, an interview allows the researchers to “keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that writers express in the literature.” (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018: 96) The interview will last about ten to fifteen minutes and the researcher will take notes of the participants’ answers.

2.5 Data analysis

After having collected all the data from the observation list and the interview, the researcher will examine the results and summarise them. As the research is qualitative, the researcher intends to group the answers of the participants in categories and code them according to their context. After that, she will describe each category by presenting the outcomes in order to create a broader image of the issue.

2.6 Ethical issues

All the principles of ethical issues were taken into account during the procedure. The participants were informed in advance about the subject of the research and about what was to be investigated. They were also informed about the tool that would be used for the observation and about the duration of the research. Before the observation started the educators gave their consent to participate. All the participants kept their anonymity during the research procedure. However, the fact that every teacher has their own subject that teaches to all the groups of students made it easy for the researcher to know who every observation list belonged to. For this reason, confidentiality of the data was guaranteed so the names of each source would not be published.

After confirming the anonymity of the research, any risks of the subject need to be taken into consideration. The researcher has made sure that the subject of the research is not to cause any harm or be considered morally unacceptable. The expected outcome of the research and the answers to the research questions will hopefully be proved to be beneficial both for the educators as well as for the educational society. If positive as it is expected, the effectiveness of CLIL methodology to young learners’ oral performance will be a stimulus for other

educators and schools to adjust it to their curriculum and apply it in their teaching process. All the above, made it easier for the participants to give their consent to the conduction of the research.

Moreover, the integrity of the observation procedure cannot be questioned even though the researcher was one of the participants. That is because the research was conducted without bias against the children's performance and the data that were collected are valid and reliable.

3. Analysis and interpretation of data

At this section, the results of the research will be presented. The conduction of research lasted for two weeks. The four teacher participants completed the observation list (see Appendix I) every day and used their experience to assess and reflect on the work that had been done during every CLIL lesson in order to give feedback about the effectiveness of the programme. After the two weeks passed, the educators went through an interview (see Appendix II) so as to express their opinion thoroughly about the CLIL methodology and its application in a classroom with very young learners. The researcher was asking questions and taking notes. As it will be discussed below, the teachers' answers show similarities that facilitate the researcher to draw a holistic conclusion on the issue. After that, the researcher will discuss the results based on the existing literature.

3.1 Observation list data analysis

Below, the researcher will present the results from the observation list that refers to the CLIL lessons. Four groups of students were observed for two weeks. Every group had a CLIL lesson four times a week. So, in total there were forty hours of observation. The data resulted from the feedback that the teachers had by the students' performance and behaviour and by their own self-assessment, that is the observation list after each lesson. The presentation will consist of three different parts according to the research questions.

3.1.1 CLIL effectiveness for very young learners' oral performance

At this part, the results of the CLIL effectiveness for very young learners' oral performance will be presented. One of the questions of the list was about whether a task was assigned during the lesson. All the teachers assigned tasks that had to do with the subject they teach and made the lesson more attractive and purposeful in order to help students use the target language and in their own way and pace. The participants were also asked to check which CLIL techniques they had used during each lesson in order to improve oral performance. They had to choose between integration of skills, group or pair work, use of ICT and scaffolding for problem solving. (see Appendix III) The results showed that all of the participants integrated more than one skill during their lesson. According to the second question of this part, all of the teachers integrated listening and speaking in all of the lessons as this production skill is always the main objective for this age group. As one of the subjects of the CLIL hours is Phonics, there were lessons where students were asked to read some sounds or copy letters or short words for their

tasks. In addition, the teachers always used scaffolding in order to help the students solve any problems that may have appeared during the task. However, depending on the subject, not all lessons included group or pair work. Instead, some of the tasks included individual work. More specifically, from the forty hours of the lessons, eleven hours of CLIL lessons did not include a group or pair work task. Moreover, thirty five out of forty CLIL lessons included the use of ICT for different reasons.

Apart from the CLIL techniques, the participants answered that they all used the learners' background knowledge so as to help students to participate in the lesson and express their opinion. Moreover, when they were asked about other resources that they used in order to encourage the oral performance, the main answers were realia, pictures or flashcards and songs. According to their answers, all of these resources seemed to be appealing and catchy and urged the students to participate more, talk in the target language by forming sentences.

It is remarkable to note here that at the last question of this part that referred to the effectiveness of the scaffolding technique on the students all the participants agreed that it was very helpful for the young learners as it boosted their understanding of the task they had to deal with and gave them the opportunity to handle further activities later during the lesson. Depending on the lesson, scaffolding urged the students to form sentences, successfully complete their tasks, play a group game or solve a problem.

Finally, the last question asked the participants to rank the stages that help the development of comprehension and production of the target language. After having studied the learners' behaviour during the exposure to the target language all the participants have agreed that first of all the learners get used to following instructions that step by step become routines, which is the second step. These two steps help the comprehension of the target language and they are followed by two more stages that are beneficial for the language production level. These are the peer communication as the students many times copy their classmates' reactions and behaviours and the expression of their opinion that comes last when the students feel ready and comfortable to expose themselves.

3.1.2 Content and language development

The second part of the observation list was about how the content and language develop respectively in a CLIL classroom environment. The first and main question was whether, according to the teachers, there was a balance in content and language development. All the

teachers gave a positive answer after reflecting on the students' performance. This result can be further shown through the following answers that ensure this balance between content and language.

For example, all the teachers responded negatively when they were asked whether they used the students' mother tongue during the lesson. Furthermore, they all confirmed that the content and the language they used were appropriate for the learners' level of English as well as for their needs and interests. As far as the new content is concerned, the teachers presented it through visual prompts, realia or videos either by engaging the students into a story or a specific context. Many times, they also used the technique of prediction and elicitation in order to gain the attention of the students.

All of them also used the learners' prior knowledge during the content presentation in order to achieve better understanding as the majority of the students seemed to participate more when they were actively involved in the teaching process and could personalise the content based on their own experiences. Better comprehension of the content was also achieved through the use of paraphrasing, synonyms and repetition techniques. All of them were used during all the lessons as teachers try to use a variety of ways to explain the new language to the students without talking in their mother tongue. The former techniques prove to be very helpful when doing a task that includes vocabulary that seems difficult or that students are not familiar with.

Towards the end of the lesson, when the teachers needed to make sure that the students had comprehended the new content and language, the answers varied. The teachers preferred to use concept-checking questions during the lesson and at the end as a summing up. Also, they like using games or worksheets at the end of the lesson that help the students assess themselves and provide the teachers with feedback on what has been acquired and what needs further practice.

Finally, the teachers were asked to refer to some techniques they use during the lesson in order to deal with any cognitive or linguistic mistakes that may have occurred. All the participants argue that the best technique to handle the students' mistakes is by repeating their sentence in the correct way but without forcing the students to say it again. Another very popular and effective way of dealing with mistakes according to the answers of the teachers is to ask a question to the student in order to indirectly make them repeat the utterance and use the language correctly.

3.1.3 Challenges when teaching CLIL

The last part of the observation list is the challenges that the teachers may have faced. To start with, none of the teachers argued that the target language was a hinder to oral performance. Maybe that was because of the very good language level of the students and the fact that the majority of them have been exposed to the target language for more than one year. Nevertheless, for any difficulties that may have appeared the teachers used flashcards or videos so as to assure the comprehension of concepts in the target language. Especially for this age group, the teachers also use gestures and body language. All the techniques mentioned above make it easier for the learners to understand the meaning of new words and as a result for the teachers to gain the students attention by the start of the lesson even when the content seems more difficult as it is written in one of their answers. The last three questions of the section were about what was more challenging about the lesson, that is cognitive demands or linguistic demands and why. In other words, the participants had to refer to any lack of resources or inappropriacy of the cognitive or linguistic level that may have caused a problem during the lesson. The teachers that conduct the STEM and Phonics lesson did not face any hard difficulties. The teacher that conducts the Games lesson answered that during some of the lessons, students found it difficult to follow the rules from the beginning because of advanced vocabulary. Thus, the teacher had to explain it again in another way or model it in front of the students. What's more, the teacher that conducts the problem-solving lesson met difficulties in presenting some more advanced concepts during some of the lessons so she needed more time in order to describe the new content with the help of the recommended techniques mentioned above.

3.2 Interview data analysis

After having presented the answers that the participants gave in the observation list, the researcher will present the answers that the teachers gave during the interview. At this point, they had the opportunity to reflect more on their work, talk about things that they find fun engaging or challenging when teaching CLIL to very young learners as well as share their own experiences from the CLIL classroom environment. As shown from the interview results all the participants are very enthusiastic with this methodology, they find it very creative as it gives the opportunity to language teachers to broaden their horizons and build on their own teaching experience.

3.2.1 CLIL effectiveness for the very young learners' oral performance

The interview consists of six questions. The first two questions refer to the first research question that has to do with the effectiveness of the CLIL methodology in the very young learners' oral performance. In the first question the teachers had to express their opinion on the reasons why they find CLIL more effective than other teaching approaches for the very young learner's oral performance. The teachers gave a variety of arguments that literally prove the very many dimensions that CLIL teaching process can take in order to provide the students with chances to gain more knowledge in content and language at the same time. (see Appendices III and IV) More specifically, based on the answers, CLIL is considered to be purposeful and give meaning to the language learning process as the language learning is combined with the content learning and it is not out of context. As teacher 1 claimed, "it makes sense, it keeps students engaged and provides them with many speaking opportunities" as they can express their opinion on a variety of topics that are interested in or that are part of their daily life. As teacher 3 mentioned, they do not only learn new terms of the target language but also come across new concepts and new ideas and through group or pair work they share experiences and knowledge with their peers and teacher. In this way, "the lesson becomes more engaging and attractive and students are eager to participate", as teacher 4 argued. Also, all teachers agreed that CLIL is appropriate for very young learners as it gives emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. The teachers' main focus is not on the use of grammatically correct utterances or syntactically correct structures but, instead, the use of vocabulary in the target language and the ability to follow instructions, respond and think in English. All these prevent students from feeling embarrassed when making mistakes and, as teacher 2 noticed, allow them, through repetition and guidance from the teacher, to gradually feel more comfortable when expressing themselves in the target language.

The second question asked the teachers to name some CLIL-based procedures and techniques that encourage students of this age to use the target language freely and naturally during the lesson and explain how they are effective for their oral performance. All four participants gave similar answers the most popular of which were the integration of more than one skill in the lesson, the use of technology and the group or pair work. (see Appendices III and V) Technology was proved to be very helpful especially when the teacher needed to present new content as the students could find out a lot about a huge variety of topics. Especially, the STEM teacher argued that during lessons that included experiments, she used the Internet to show the

experiment to the students and let them guess the result before actually doing it themselves. Moreover, they insisted that the group or pair work encourages the students to feel more comfortable when using the target language during the task and they are not afraid of exposing themselves when being part of a group. Finally, the teachers have realised that the integration of more than one skill especially when there is a combination of receptive and productive skills helps the students to fully comprehend the new content and language and feel confident when they will be asked to produce it.

3.2.2 Content and language development

The third question of the interview refers to the simultaneous development of content and language during the lesson. The teachers were asked whether in their opinion content and language can be respectively developed in a CLIL environment as well as the ways in which the students can acquire both during the lesson and they gave various answers. Two of the teachers agreed that, when a language is taught through a specific content that students are interested in, they get easier urged to participate in the lesson and express their opinion or share knowledge using the target language. One of the teachers specifically said that “this procedure takes place naturally and freely and the students get familiarised with the thematic vocabulary.” The third participant argued that a new content that refers to a specific topic according to the age of the students, like the farm animals, allows the students to get involved in a variety of activities from different learning areas, that is Language, Numeracy, Science, Movement games. Thus, they can easier understand the new vocabulary and they have many more opportunities to use the language. Finally, the fourth teacher added that learning new vocabulary framed in an attractive content makes it more meaningful for the learners and it is much easier for them to acquire the thematic vocabulary day by day and talk about the content.

3.2.3 Challenges when teaching CLIL

The following questions have to do with the challenges the teachers or students may face in a CLIL classroom environment. Firstly, they were asked what they find more challenging in CLIL methodology and what teachers can do to overcome any hinders. (see Appendices III and VI) The most common answers were two. First of all, Teachers 1 and 2 talked about the high linguistic demands that they may face as the lesson is “not conducted in the students’ mother tongue” and that they need techniques to facilitate their lesson. Secondly, the fact that the content that the teachers are working on is not always already known by the learners in their

mother tongue and so teachers need more time to introduce “not only the new vocabulary but also the new content” as Teacher 3 claimed. Teacher 4, also, argued that “this creates a very big obstacle as it is very time consuming for a foreign language teacher to start a new content from the very beginning.”

In order to overcome these challenges teachers concluded on some techniques that would allow them to make their lesson more effective without the student getting bored. For example, all the teachers suggested the use of visual aids in the classroom. Teacher 2 thought that they need more preparation time before the lesson while Teacher 1 recommended the use of “attractive content” in order to encourage the students to participate. Teacher 4, also, argued that “...For this reason, the teachers need to use more body language and visual aids as well as try to downgrade the vocabulary level when they introduce the new content. Moreover, they should allow more time for freer practice at the end of the lesson.”

The second question of this section asked the teachers to give an example of a lesson that turned to be very difficult due to higher cognitive or linguistic demands and how they dealt with the problems they appeared or the negative feedback from the students. The teacher that conducts the Phonics lesson claimed that she had had problems with higher linguistic demands. The only problem that students have to face sometimes is the fact that though some of the English letters are written the same way in Greek but their sound is different, like the sound p that in Greek stands for the sound r. In this case, the teacher needs practise the recognition of the sound more through reading or drilling words that start from this sound or activities that encourage the children to trace it before actually produce it. The STEM teacher reported that most of the times the content is already known to the students. The most challenging lesson though was about the concept of gravity as the majority of the students understood the idea from the warm up activity of the lesson, that is the video that was shown, but some of them did not get the idea so the teacher had to pause the video in order to show some examples with real objects from the classroom. She picked up objects and then let them down so the students can understand the concept of gravity and then acted out the Newton story of how he discovered gravity. The teacher who plays Games with the students explained that once she tried to play a game with the water cycle vocabulary but some of the students were not yet familiarised with the concepts of evaporation and condensation. So, she decided to change the lesson plan and before the game she had prepared to play she encouraged the students to act out the water cycle. The teacher was narrating the story of the “little drops in the sky” while explaining in simple words

the difficult concepts. After that, the students were ready to go a step forward to play the next game. Finally, the Problem-Solving teacher confessed that during a lesson she found difficulties trying to help the students to solve a maths problem. “The problem required their full attention but the students were twenty-four so I used more concept-checking questions using words like “adding” and “taking away” in order to encourage them to think and answer.” she argued.

Last but not least, the final question asked the teachers if they find it difficult for a foreign language teacher to teach different types of content. All the teachers answered that they find it very interesting as it helps them a lot to advance the level of the lesson and enhance their teaching methods and techniques. They declared that the CLIL methodology is full of surprises both for the students and for the teachers and the best proof is the positive feedback from the students who feel excited and the learning comes more smoothly.

As a whole, all the comments concerning the CLIL methodology were very positive and whatever the challenges the teachers may face, the results seem to have a very positive effect on the learners and on the teachers and the classroom environment becomes joyful, entertaining and pleasant as well as a whole unexplored world full of new ideas and opportunities. The teachers seem to be experienced enough to deal with the difficulties and adjust the lesson to their group.

3.3 Discussion

According to all the findings analysed above, all the teachers seem to be in favour of the CLIL methodology for various reasons and consider CLIL as a key to unlock more creative and effective ways of learning. At this section, the data of the research will be further interpreted and it will be shown how the results of the research are not only supported by a small part of the teachers’ community but also by many scientists and teachers in the respective literature.

First and foremost, the learners from a very early age get familiar with the target language to talk about a content that suits their needs and interests and motivated to use it for communicational purposes. More specifically, students attending CLIL classes seem to significantly improve in content knowledge of a particular school subject (Stoller, 2004, Serra, 2007). Also, students are provided with opportunities for being exposed in an authentic learning environment (Troncale, 2002), and this is likely to result in their higher motivation through their willingness to be involved and participate.” (Griva and Deligianni, 2017: 10)

Having in mind that the focus is on a foreign language learning environment, the CLIL teachers supported how important the need to come up with resources and techniques that facilitate the introduction of the new content as well as the presentation of the new terminology and to encourage the oral performance of the students is. As far as the CLIL techniques are concerned, the teachers seem to use a combination of them during the lessons as they refer to a quite big number of students in a mixed-ability class where each student has their own learning abilities. It seems that the use of ICT is one of the most popular techniques and this can be inferred from the fact that during the research all the teachers integrated ICT sources in the lesson for different purposes either for information, experiments, pictures, stories or songs. As Mattheoudakis (2017) supports, internet provides the teachers with a variety of pictures, songs and videos that enable the efficient content presentation. The participants also answered that during the lesson they used CLIL techniques that promote language for learning like integrating more than one skill, so the lesson becomes more attractive and interesting and assigning tasks that need group or pair work. Having said that, Coyle (2006, as cited in Spratt, 2017: 46) argues that “it is the language which allows them to develop and work with learning skills such as ‘cooperative group work, asking questions, debating, chatting, enquiring, thinking, memorising and so on’.

The outcomes of the research presented above can also explain why, in a CLIL classroom, the content, indeed, develops together with the language and the fact that there can actually be a balance between the two. The most important role here is that of the teacher who is asked to adjust the content and the language to the learners’ needs, interests and level of cognitive or linguistic knowledge. This can be done through scaffolding which, as the participants noticed, enhances the comprehension of the content and the pragmatic use of the target language by the students in order to do the tasks and remain interested and concentrated. The lesson becomes student-centred and learners take an active role in the learning process as participants of a conversation without realising they have a lesson at that moment. As Reber (1967) in Craen and Surmont (2017) argues CLIL creates an implicitly learning environment and the learners participate in the lesson without really realizing that at this moment they are actually learning. Knowledge is acquired rather than learnt and this also achieved through the activity selection by the CLIL teachers who give more emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. “The emphasis is on activity, i.e. learning by doing in the target language and hardly any attention is paid to its formal aspects.” (Craen and Surmont, 2017: 26) That is why, as it can be concluded from this research, assigning tasks is the main way for the teacher to check the comprehension of

the content, encourage the use of the target language for a reason as well as assess if the difficulties that students may encounter and the balance between content and language level during the lesson.

Moreover, the participants noticed that when introducing a new content, they always use the learners' background knowledge so they achieve better insight. Indeed, research has shown that in order to familiarise the students with the new terminology it is essential to build on the already acquired knowledge. More specifically, "learning means building on previous experiences and knowledge" (Craen and Surmont, 2017: 27) Having said that, it is remarkable to note here that, the teachers activate learners' background knowledge and introduce new terminology by using visual aids, like pictures, realia or videos.

Another controversial issue concerning CLIL methodology is how the teachers should deal with the mistakes. The participants of the research noticed that, when the students made a mistake, they tried either to repeat the structure correctly or ask questions in order to encourage the students rephrase their sentence. However, if a mistake was not an obstacle for communication, they did not give emphasis on it. So, the mistakes should be corrected only if they hinder the communication during the activities and the task. (Mattheoudakis, 2017) In this teaching context at this specific school though, the reason why the teachers feel more comfortable to correct mistakes both in language and content more often is because the majority of the students are exposed to the foreign language more than one year and they are not embarrassed any more to be corrected, so the teachers add more challenges and objectives.

What needs to be taken into consideration, however, is the challenges that foreign language teachers face when teaching CLIL. "Whether in a CLIL class or not, students in foreign language classes regularly encounter problems with communicating difficult content." (Mattheoudakis, 2017: 20) It is the responsibility of the teacher to adjust the content and language demands to the level of the students and assess their appropriateness. In addition, since the new content is presented in another language, it should respond to their needs and interests in order to gain the students' attention.

Overall, the participants consider the CLIL methodology challenging rather than demanding as it gives them more opportunities to enhance their way of teaching and teaching techniques.

Implications

After having presented, analysed and discussed the results of the research, I am going to present the further implications that arise in two different dimensions. Firstly, I am going to present what can be implied for further research on the field and then what can be further applied and put into practice in a classroom environment.

To start with, the research showed CLIL has remarkable effects on the very young learners' oral performance. Other researchers could investigate whether it can have the same results on other age groups and even compare which age group seems to be the most benefited from the CLIL methodology in terms of fluency. Moreover, provided that CLIL methodology involves challenges both for the students and for the teachers, the needs of the former and the latter can be taken into consideration in order to discover how these challenges can be decreased or eliminated. Furthermore, having in mind that in the very early ages cognitive and linguistic level are both low and it is easier to develop at the same time, it would be very interesting to investigate whether in older age groups this balance can still be kept or cognitive skills linguistic due to more exposure to new content in the students' native language.

As far as implications in practice are concerned, the research underlined the importance of teachers' training on teaching CLIL. More specifically, teachers should be aware of the techniques and the methods they need to follow during the teaching process as well as the tools they are necessary for their lesson. Techniques are important in order for the teachers to facilitate the presentation of the new content and language and make the lesson in the target language more attractive. Well-trained teachers might mean better handling of the potential challenges that may appear. Together with the teachers' training, schools should be equipped with the appropriate tools and resources for CLIL so they meet the students' needs and interests. In addition, teachers and decision makers may need to start changing and upgrading the aims and objectives of the very young learners' level and provide them with more stimuli and a variety of contents in order to broaden their horizons. In this way, foreign language teachers of CLIL will be able to introduce the new language easier without facing hinder due to unknown concepts. The selection of topics can happen after discussion with the students about what they are interested in or what they would like to learn about.

Limitations

The research has examined how the CLIL methodology affects the very young learners' oral performance. As it was shown from the results, this methodology is very beneficial for this age group as it facilitates the English Language Teaching for the purposes of communication and fluency. However, the sample that was taken was quite small provided that the research was conducted in only one school for a short period of time and not through a whole school year. What's more, the age group that the research was addressed to was very specific, that is four to six-year-old students, and its results cannot be compared to older age groups that have a different cognitive and linguistic background.

The researcher has also reflected on the challenges that teachers and learners may face in a CLIL environment during the teaching process. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the CLIL methodology is applied in many schools in Greece and other countries around Europe, it is still not applied in the Greek schools for this special age group. Therefore, the small number of schools that use it nowadays are not yet well equipped with the appropriate and adequate material. Also, the CLIL teachers are not all well trained yet as the CLIL teaching experience in Greece counts only some years. That is why, it cannot still be clear whether the challenges that may come up or the potential lack of balance between content and language are due to the inadequacy of materials and inexperience of the teachers or there are other reasons that need to be further investigated.

Conclusion

Overall, the above research has observed, examined and proved how effective the CLIL learning environment can be for the oral performance level as far as the very young learners are concerned. It has also proved that even in a foreign language learning class, the lesson can be attractive and interesting for the learners and the content comprehension can be combined with language comprehension in a balance so the one does not surpass the other. In addition, it is clear that whatever the challenges during the CLIL teaching process, the teachers are ready and experienced to face them and learn more about CLIL techniques and methods.

The results of the research may encourage even more Greek schools to incorporate the CLIL methodology in their core programme even for the very young learners, because especially in this very young age it is much easier for the students to absorb new cognitive and linguistic

knowledge. This will turn out to be very helpful for them as the main aim of foreign language learning is communication and fluency and not the use of decontextualised language forms.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Inquiry on CLIL Methodology

Observation List

Age of students:.....

Number of students:.....

Observation date:.....

Subject:.....

| A. CLIL effectiveness for very young learners' oral performance | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|
| <p>1.Put a (√) on the following CLIL techniques that you used in your lesson today to improve oral performance?</p> <p>__integration of skills</p> <p>__group/pair work</p> <p>__use of ICT</p> <p>__scaffolding for problem solving</p> | | |
| <p>2.Which skills did you combine and why?</p> <p>.....</p> | | |
| <p>5.Did you assign a task during your lesson to encourage them to use the target language in their own way and pace?</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
| <p>6. What other resources did you use to encourage oral performance?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>6.1. How were they effective?</p> <p>.....</p> | | |
| <p>7. Did they use background knowledge to participate in the lesson and express their opinion?</p> | | |
| <p>8. How effective was scaffolding for them?</p> <p>.....</p> | | |
| <p>9. Put the following in order from 1-4 to show how the comprehension and production of the target language are developed:</p> <p>___ peer communication</p> <p>___ routines</p> <p>___ express opinion</p> <p>___ follow instructions</p> | | |

| B. Content and Language development | YES | NO |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. Do you think there was a balance in content and language development in your lesson today? | | |
| 2. Did you use their mother tongue? | | |
| 3. Was the content appropriate for the learners' needs and interests? | | |
| 4. Which techniques did you use to present the new content? | | |
| 5. Which CLIL techniques did you use to achieve better comprehension of the content? __ repetition __ paraphrasing __ synonyms | | |
| 4. Was the content and language used appropriate for the learners' level of English? | | |
| | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| 5. Did you use their prior knowledge to introduce the content in the target language? | | |
| 6. How did you deal with grammar or syntax mistakes during the students' oral performance? What error correction techniques did you use? | | |
| 7. How did you check the comprehension of the content in the target language? (concept checking questions, games, pair work, etc) | | |

| C. Challenges when teaching CLIL | YES | NO |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. Was the target language a hinder to oral performance? | | |
| 1.1. How did you deal with it? 1.2. What did you use to help you? (flashcards, body language) | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | |
| 3. Based on the content you chose, was it difficult to gain their attention during the lesson? | | |
| 4. What did you find the most difficult in terms of the content teaching? <input type="checkbox"/> non-adequate visual aids <input type="checkbox"/> advanced concepts for this age | | |
| 5. What did you find the most difficult in terms of the language teaching? <input type="checkbox"/> non-adequate visual aids <input type="checkbox"/> advanced vocabulary | | |
| 6. Based on your lesson plan today, what did you find more challenging for your students? <input type="checkbox"/> cognitive demands <input type="checkbox"/> linguistic demands | | |

Appendix II

Inquiry on CLIL Methodology

Interview

Number of participants: 4

Attribute of participants: CLIL teachers

1. In your opinion, why is CLIL methodology more effective than other teaching approaches for the very young learners' oral performance?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Can you name some CLIL-based procedures and techniques that encourage students of this age to use the target language freely and naturally during the lesson and how they are effective for their oral performance?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Do you think that content and language can be respectively developed in a CLIL environment? How can the students acquire both during the lesson?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6. What do you find more challenging in teaching both language and content? What can a teacher do to overcome these challenges?

.....
.....

.....
.....
.....

7.Can you give me an example of very difficult lesson due to inappropriate content (high cognitive demands) or difficult language (high linguistic demands)? How did you deal with it?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.Do you think that the teaching of different types of content is difficult for a language teacher?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix III

Interview

| | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 | TEACHER 4 |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <u>Question 1</u> Why is CLIL effective? | Makes sense/purposeful Ss are engaged Provides speaking opportunities | Focus on fluency Ss feel comfortable to be exposed Learning knowledge | New concepts and ideas Sharing experience and knowledge | Purposeful Attractive Engaging lesson |
| <u>Question 2</u> CLIL-based procedures and techniques | Technology Pair/Group work Integration of skills | Technology Pair/Group work Integration of skills | Technology Pair/Group work Integration of skills | Technology Pair/Group work Integration of skills |
| <u>Question 3</u> Ways to overcome the challenges | Visual aids Attractive content | Visual aids More preparation time | Visual aids Simplify the vocabulary to gain the ss' interest | Visual aids Downgrade vocabulary |

Appendix IV

Based on the above board, I am going to code the questions separately in order to show the themes that occur from the teachers' answers.

Question 1: In your opinion, why is CLIL methodology more effective than other teaching approaches for the very young learners' oral performance?

| | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 | TEACHER 4 |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| PURPOSEFUL LEARNING | √ | | | √ |
| ATTRACTIVE/ ENGAGING LESSON | √ | | | √ |
| SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES | √ | | | |
| LEARNING KNOWLEDGE/ CONCEPTS AND IDEAS | | √ | √ | |
| SHARING EXPERIENCES | | | √ | |
| COMFORTABLE TO BE EXPOSED | | √ | | |
| FOCUS ON FLUENCY | | √ | | |

Appendix V

Question 2: Can you name some CLIL-based procedures and techniques that encourage students of this age to use the target language freely and naturally during the lesson and how they are effective for their oral performance?

| | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 | TEACHER 4 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| TECHNOLOGY | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| PAIR/ GROUP WORK | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| INTEGRATION OF SKILLS | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Appendix VI

Question 6: What do you find more challenging in teaching both language and content?

| | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 | TEACHER 4 |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| HIGH LINGUISTIC DEMANDS | √ | √ | | |
| HIGH COGNITIVE DEMANDS | | | √ | √ |

Based on the above data, the teachers took into consideration the difficulties they face during the lesson and decided to use the techniques presented below to overcome these challenges.

What can a teacher do to overcome these challenges?

| | TEACHER 1 | TEACHER 2 | TEACHER 3 | TEACHER 4 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| VISUAL AIDS | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| MORE PREPARATION TIME | | √ | | |
| DOWNGRADE VOCABULARY | | | √ | √ |
| ATTRACTIVE CONTENT | √ | | | |