



Combined use of CLIL and Visual Arts to Enhance Second Language Acquisition in Young Learners: A systematized Literature Review

Uso combinado de CLIL y Artes Visuales para mejorar la adquisición de una segunda lengua en aprendices jóvenes: una revisión sistematizada de la literatura

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Bibiana Rojas-Barragán

Camilo José Cela University
bibiana.rojas@alumno.ucjc.edu

 0009-0000-1557-7716

Presentación Ángeles Caballero-García

Camilo José Cela University
pcaballero@ucjc.edu

 0000-0002-8436-7429

Abstract: The purpose of this research was to make a systematic literature review of empirical studies developed in teaching a second language in the early years of schooling, following the Prisma guidelines, with the aim of finding answers on how the use of Visual Arts from the perspective of the Integrated Learning of Content and Foreign Languages can improve the acquisition of the target language, increasing intrinsic motivation in young students and, therefore, their knowledge and communication skills. From the 26 papers, selected according to criteria of suitability and relevance to fulfill the research objectives, we conclude that teaching the second language using the CLIL approach and the Visual Arts together has the potential to promote a "natural language environment" where students can express their ideas in a creative way, at the same time they are increasing their knowledge and communication skills. Results are discussed for their implications for educational practice.

Keywords: Second language acquisition- Motivation- CLIL approach- Visual Arts- Primary school.

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Resumen: El propósito de esta investigación fue hacer una revisión bibliográfica sistemática de los estudios empíricos desarrollados en la enseñanza de una segunda lengua en los primeros años de escolarización, siguiendo las directrices Prisma, con el fin de encontrar respuestas sobre cómo el uso de las Artes Visuales desde la perspectiva del Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras puede mejorar la adquisición de la lengua meta, aumentando la motivación intrínseca en los jóvenes estudiantes y, por lo tanto, sus conocimientos y habilidades comunicativas. De los 26 trabajos, seleccionados según criterios de idoneidad y relevancia para cumplir los objetivos de la investigación, se concluye que la enseñanza de la segunda lengua utilizando conjuntamente el enfoque AICLE y las Artes Visuales tiene el potencial de promover un "entorno lingüístico natural" en el que los estudiantes pueden expresar sus ideas de forma creativa, al mismo tiempo que aumentan sus conocimientos y habilidades comunicativas. Los resultados se discuten por sus implicaciones para la práctica educativa.

Palabras claves: Adquisición de una segunda lengua- Motivación- Enfoque AICLE- Artes visuales- Educación primaria.

Introduction

English has become a universal language used as a global lingua franca to make business, for cultural exchange, etc. Governments around the world have examined the language curricula in schools and found that traditional approaches to language teaching have focused too much on English language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, rules, and syntaxes, and not enough in the use of the English to exchange meanings and develop the communication competence. The methodology should not only be designed for a second language (L2) approach, but also for acquiring the lingua franca of the 21st (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018).

With these arguments in mind, it is important to review teaching methodologies and focus on the most successful L2 approaches. In the history of L2 teaching, different methodologies have been employed, however, nowadays none of them works on its own. Teachers and academics have opted for the use of mixed methodologies (eclectic approach). This new way of teaching English can be observed in almost all L2 teaching lessons today (Renau, 2016).

On the other hand, obtaining high linguistic proficiency is a difficult goal to achieve. In the 1940s, it was investigated how learners transfer their first language to acquire a new one and it was found that motivation plays an important role in this process, being considered as a personal attitudinal factor that has the power to determine the success rate towards language learning. Little can be learned without motivation (Martello, 2017). Motivation is a multifaceted concept that involves affective, cognitive, and behavioural elements (Doiz, et al., 2014) and is affected by the classroom environment, the nature of the course, the content of the curriculum, and teacher and student characteristics (Gardner, 1993).

Another relevant aspect involves the need to be immersed in the language as much as possible to increase language proficiency (Alvarez, 2018; Allison & Rehm, 2011; García & Kleifgen, 2010). In this sense, different alternatives have been explored. In our study we have selected Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Visual Arts, among others, and argued and evaluated their full potential.

CLIL has been selected because it is an educational approach that collectively encompasses any activity in which the foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of non-language subjects (Doiz et al., 2014) and because of its ability to provide the learner with more context and space to use the foreign language, which increases motivation and the quality of their learning (Coyle et al., 2010).

Visual Arts used as a tool for L2 acquisition, meanwhile, have been revealed as an opportunity to connect with students' different intelligences. Art can create a safe environment where students are

more willing to ask questions and make mistakes, incite curiosity, consider personal and emotional responses that trigger and enhance motivation in L2 acquisition with positive outcomes (Al-Almri, 2011; Alvarez, 2018; Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Farokhi & Hashemi 2012; Martello, 2017; Punzalan, 2018). Arts education has significant effects on achievement (Punzalan, 2018). In the case of English language learning, research has shown that L2 learners acquire language through the arts by "doing" and "using" the target language constantly throughout their lives in communities of practice (Alvarez, 2018). The visual arts provide an additional way to communicate and express our feelings. They are a tool to help us raise our voices, take pride in our heritage, and learn about culture to build our own knowledge. They allow students to learn while practicing and give them the opportunity to develop new concepts and technical language in an L2 (Korosidou & Griva, 2014).

The combination of Visual Arts and CLIL can provide students with a program that includes the universal language of art elements and images to improve multiple intelligences, foster critical and conceptual thinking, creative solving skills and the L2 acquisition.

In our literature review we have found studies of CLIL use from a Visual Arts perspective that use Art content for L2 acquisition (Korosidou & Griva, 2014). Research such as Kokko et al. (2015) is an example of how Visual Arts can improve math and science outcomes and visible evidence of how motivation helps improve learning. Primary school is a good opportunity to implement this type of practice for L2 acquisition. Children at this educational stage are in the process of simultaneously developing different skills and are not afraid of making mistakes, therefore, it is easier to stimulate their cognitive factors through activities that give them the possibility of using their special intelligences (Alvarez, 2018; Asmali, 2017; Jiménez Morales, 2016). However, evidence shows that CLIL and visual arts studies have placed greater emphasis on the analysis of adolescent and university populations and not so much on primary school, hence our interest in offering useful contributions for this educational stage.

In view of the above, the objectives of this study were to: address L2 learning and the methodologies employed for this purpose; describe the importance of motivation for L2 acquisition and the approaches employed with young learners; review the characteristics of the CLIL and Visual Arts approach and assess its educational impact; highlight the role of Visual Arts and its use combined with CLIL methodology and propose it as an effective practice for successful L2 learning, particularly for primary school students, and progressively for any educational stage.

Methodology

The methodology employed was documentary analysis through a systematic review. Its development followed the guidelines provided by Petticrew & Roberts (2008) for systematic reviews in Social Sciences, the Campbell® Collaboration guide proposed by Hernández & Camargo (2017) and the PRISMA statement, which was adopted as a framework to ensure the transparency, traceability and reproducibility of the selection process. The procedure comprised the following stages: search and identification of studies, filtering (screening), application of inclusion/exclusion criteria (eligibility), qualitative evaluation of methodological quality, systematization of information, and analysis of results.

The identification phase was conducted through searches in academic search engines and specialised databases, specifically Google Scholar, Science Direct, WOS, SSRN, DOAJ, ISOC-CSIC, ERIC, DIALNET and ResearchGate.

The search was guided by three main objectives: (1) to identify research conducted in Primary Education classrooms related to L2 acquisition that allowed for a comparison between the CLIL approach and more traditional methodologies; (2) to identify studies examining the impact of different L2 teaching methodologies on motivation and learning success; and (3) to review literature addressing

the role of the CLIL approach and Visual Arts, both separately and in combination, in L2 acquisition in Primary Education. The search process was iterative, allowing for the refinement of keywords and descriptors in order to improve the relevance of the results obtained.

Following the initial screening of titles and abstracts, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

1. Empirical studies or review articles directly focused on L2 acquisition.
2. Research addressing educational methodologies and interventions linked to the CLIL approach and/or the role of Visual Arts in L2 acquisition.
3. Studies conducted at the Primary Education level.
4. Peer-reviewed sources from internationally recognised scientific journals and/or endorsed by universities or official academic institutions.
5. Publications dated between 2009 and 2019.

This period corresponds to a stage of theoretical consolidation and growing empirical research on CLIL in compulsory education, during which classroom-based studies became more systematically established. Limiting the time frame also ensured the comparability of pedagogical, curricular and institutional contexts across the selected studies.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused on educational stages other than Primary Education, were theoretical or divulgative in nature without an empirical or analytical basis, lacked a clear description of the methodological design or educational intervention, or addressed CLIL or Visual Arts only tangentially without an explicit connection to L2 acquisition.

Furthermore, in line with PRISMA recommendations, studies that met the inclusion criteria were subjected to a qualitative assessment of their methodological quality. The indicators considered included: (a) clarity and coherence of the research objectives; (b) suitability of the methodological design to the aims of the study; (c) sufficient description of the educational context, sample and instructional intervention; (d) alignment between data collection procedures and the results reported; and (e) explicit acknowledgement of limitations. This evaluation made it possible to discard methodologically weak contributions and to ensure the consistency of the final corpus.

Figure 1 shows the "PRISMA 2020 flow diagram" corresponding to the systematised search process, and Table 1 summarises the keywords used, along with the number of articles retrieved and selected as relevant for this study. As a result of this selection process, 26 bibliographic references were ultimately included and constituted the basis for the development and fulfilment of the objectives of the present research. Although the review corpus was restricted to the defined period for methodological consistency, more recent references were considered in the discussion section in order to contextualise the findings and to highlight emerging research trends, without altering the corpus of the systematic review.

Figure 1. *PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for systematised search performed.*

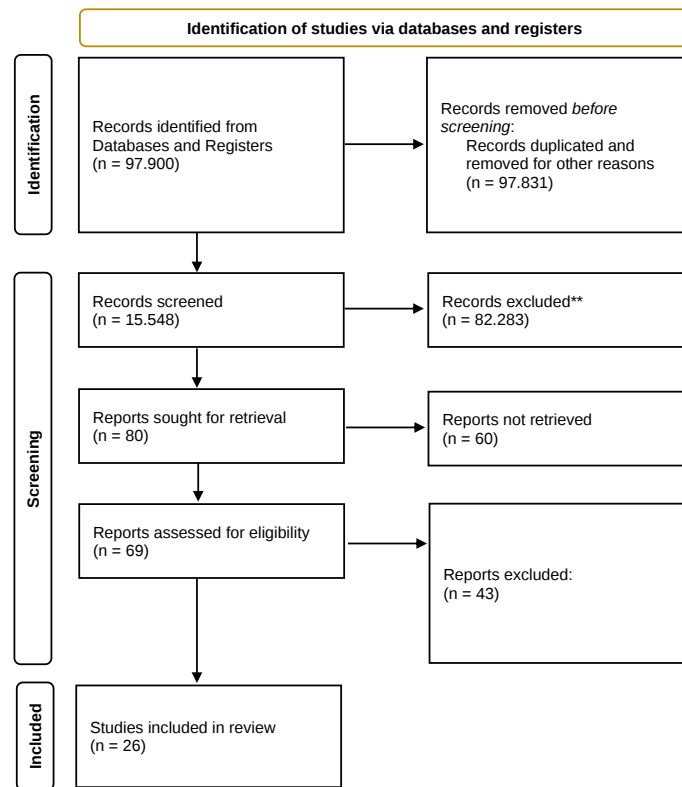


Table 1. *Summary of Keywords used and number of selected articles.*

Keyword and/or subject headings	Total numbers of the result found	Number of the results with this thematic in the report
Language teaching methods OR Approaches to L2	97.900	26
Language teaching methods OR Approaches to L2 + Motivation	168	9
Language teaching methods OR Approaches to L2 + CLIL in Elementary OR Primary students OR Young learners	4800	12
Benefits AND/OR disadvantages of the CLIL approach in Elementary OR Primary students OR Young learners	1540	5
Language teaching methods OR Approaches to L2 + Visual Arts OR Art Education in Elementary OR Primary students OR Young learners	7300	12

Language teaching methods OR Approaches to L2 + CLIL + Visual Arts in Elementary OR Primary students OR Young learners	1740	5
Total included		26

Results

Second language learning

The main reason why people learn a L2 it could come from a personal or professional interest in communicating by written and spoken means. Nowadays, acquiring a L2 is important, given the context of globalization and the increasing importance of the English as the lingua franca (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018).

Martello (2017) describes the challenges a student faces when approaching to a new language that includes a new culture, way of thinking, feeling, and acting, and criticizes how academic courses in foreign languages are frequently inadequate for a successful L2 acquisition, arguing that only few people achieve fluency in a foreign language exclusively been in a classroom (Tedick & Wesely, 2015).

On the other hand, there is a growing number of immigrants living in countries where languages other than their mother tongue (L1) are spoken. Primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools around the world have opted to develop language immersion programs (Martello, 2017). Language immersion has been evaluated as a key tool that helps increase language proficiency. But immersion programs in Europe target a wide range of languages that often have second or regional language status and are trying to solve the pedagogical problem of mixing language and content instruction, conducive to students learning concepts and skills using a language in which they have low proficiency (Alvarez, 2018). In his analysis, Alvarez points out that in these situations L2 teaching usually focuses on teaching rules, syntax and vocabulary, and the expectation of language improvement through direct study. However, recent research has shown that learning words and structure independently is not as effective as using language as a means of teaching content.

A content language approach offers students listening and speaking possibilities and gives them opportunities for active participation in which they can develop meaningful understanding that will end up improving their language acquisition, especially in elementary level students, who show enthusiasm to participate, give their opinions, and ask questions if the content motivates their interest and stimulates their attention (Ellison, 2019).

When it comes to L2 acquisition, language learners must have a supportive environment to reduce the affective filter in the classroom. They learn best in environments where they do not feel pressure or embarrassment. This allows them to feel confident and take risks when communicating in English, which lead to more effective learning (Alvarez, 2018; Allison & Rehm, 2011).

In our literature review, we found effective techniques in terms of L2 learning: pairing with someone who understands the language better, cooperative learning, etc. But what is clear is that children learn language best when they try to produce it; the content is appropriate for the student's age level and interest; and it motivates them to inquire, question, and enrich their lexicon (Alvarez, 2018).

Methodologies for the second language acquisition

Different methodologies have been found for successful foreign language acquisition (Renau, 2016):

- The direct method: The students are not allowed to use L1. The instruction is done completely in the target language. The emphasis is on good pronunciation rather than grammar rules.
- Grammar-translation: Learning comes by the translation to and from the target language. Grammar rules and vocabulary need to be memorized.
- Audio-lingual: It's based on acquiring habits, listening, and practicing dialogues of all kinds of situations.
- The structural approach: It focuses on pure grammatical rules to be learned one by one in a set order.
- Suggestopedia: The student needs to be receptive, think positive and get rid of psychological barriers and mental block to be ready to learn.
- Total physical response: Learners respond to simple commands: "Open your book", "Close the door", etc. This approach emphasizes the importance of aural comprehension.
- Communicative language teaching: The language is used to communicate effectively in different situations. The content of this approach is based on functions like inviting, suggesting, complaining and notions and expressions of time, quantity, and location.
- The silent way: L1 is not used in the classroom, and the teacher says as little as possible so that students can be in control of what they want to say.
- Community language learning: It's about building a strong connections and personal links between the learner and the teacher to avoid learning blocks.
- Immersion: Students are immersed in the L2 for all the school day, and they are expected to learn different subjects like math, science, history, arts, etc. using the target language as the means to communicate.
- Task based language: Works around the completion of a task, that is itself interesting to the students. Learners are supposed to use the L2 to complete the task, and there is little correction of the mistakes.
- The Natural Approach: The students learn in a safe environment in which similarities between learning their native language and their L2 are evident. Considering that there is no correction of the errors, learning takes place when the students are exposed to language that is comprehensible or made comprehensible to them.
- The Lexical Syllabus: Requires a computer analysis of the language, identifying the most used words and their different uses. Emphasizes the use of authentic materials. The curriculum teaches these vocabularies, according to frequency of use.
- The Grammar-Translation Method: known as the classical method, is a traditional teaching technique used to teach Latin and Greek, focusing on text translation, grammar, and vocabulary memorization, rather than on listening comprehension and oral communication.

These methods (see Table 2 for advantages/disadvantages) have been criticized as inefficient and obsolete in modern language teaching practice because they are based on the use of texts.

Table 2. *Advantages/disadvantages of the methodologies for the second language acquisition*

Methodology	Advantages	Disadvantages
Direct method	– Good pronunciation, educate the ear to new tones in the L2. – No pressure to learn the rules.	– Reading, writing, and grammar are either ignored or not taught systematically. – Disadvantageous for large classes, considering the differences and speed of learning, oral skills, and pronunciation. – Students can lose the intrinsic motivation when they cannot correctly pronounce a word, getting stuck in the tone more than in the meaning of what they want to say.
Grammar-translation (Classical method)	- Its beneficial to differentiate by levels, giving different exercises according to the skills of each student. - Help students to understand the meaning of a word by the translation of it in their own language.	– Nonsignificant oral work to develop communication competences. – The students are not able to develop the capacity of thinking in the target language. – It's not helpful to learn good pronunciation. – The focus is given in the rules and the grammar. – The students can lose the intrinsic motivation to learn the language by the pressure of learning the rules.
Audio-lingual	- Help students to develop listening and speaking skills. - It's an easy method to teach in a large group of L2 learners.	– It doesn't help with the oral skills. – The meanings of the words can be limited, considering the emphasis on the pronunciation instead. – Reading and writing skills are ignored. – This method relies in memorization. – The intrinsic motivation can be diminished by boredom as the students become mere passive learners.
Structural approach	- It works with the main skills: listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. - Teaching the L2 structures might facilitate its learning, as the child automatically is learning grammar, word order and use of words. - Promote students to speak the language correctly.	– Repetition of the structures can become boring, so the interest of the students decreases while the intrinsic motivation falls. – Reading and writing ability of the students might be neglected. – It's difficult to find skilled teachers that maintain the interest and motivation in the students, falling in the drilling and repetition of the structure.
Suggestopedia	- Using music during the process of learning might increase the concentration of the student. - It has a relaxing environment. - The furniture setup invites the students to participate.	– The music can also be a disadvantage for some people who cannot focus and get easily distracted by this noise. – It's not appropriate for large classes. – Authoritative behaviour of the teacher.

Total physical response	- It can be learned by playing games, which makes it fun and easy. - The teacher doesn't need a lot of preparation. - Good for learning basic vocabulary. - It can be used in larger classes. - It can be used as a warmup when beginning a L2 class.	- Even though it can be fun is not a very creative method, students cannot express their own views and thoughts in a creative way. - It is limited. - Reading, writing, and grammar are not taught at all. - It doesn't develop skills for the communication competence.
Communicative language teaching	- Its student oriented, considering that it's based on their needs and interests. - It looks to personalize, localize language, and adapt it to the students' interests. - It uses authentic resources, making the learning more interesting and motivating for the students. - The L2 learners acquire grammar rules as a necessity to speak, which makes the interaction more efficient. - The four language skills need to be integrated in the learning process	- It doesn't pay enough attention to the context where the teaching and learning take place. - CLT, is more focused on fluency but not in accuracy, which can end up in a student producing incoherent and grammatically incorrect sentences. - Having a native speaker of the target language can make it difficult for them to understand the meanings of what the students try to communicate in the process of acquiring the language, hence the intrinsic motivation can be diminished by the frustration of the student who would think that is not doing a good effort to sort out the language.
Silent way	- Students have the possibility to interact with each other. - The students take the lead on their own learning, correcting their own mistakes, while the teacher's role is only a guidance. - The teachers can observe their students carefully and be available for them.	- Teachers must be well prepared to this method, being prepared with effective teaching aids, anticipating problems for the students understanding of the concepts. - Students will lose their intrinsic motivation when they must struggle with concepts that in other approaches would be easily clarified by the teacher. - The silence of the teacher prevents the students from listening active models of the correct usage of the language. - The creation of a less oriented teacher classroom generates a negative opposite extreme.
Community language learning	- It has a counselling technique which alleviates anxiety, threat and personal and language problems learning a L2.	- Students often need directions, and the teacher might be too non-directive. - This method is completely relied on inductive learning. - Translation is a difficult task

	- It has a student-centered nature that can provide extrinsic motivation and capitalize intrinsic motivation. - The teacher (counselor) allows the students to determine the type of conversation and to analyse the language inductively.	- Students that are not ready to learn independently and with high motivation will be frustrated as they are the client who decide what to learn and get little instruction from the teacher.
Immersion	- L2 is the medium of classroom instruction, it can be used with all the subjects. - Normally is taught by a native speaker of the target language. - Fosters bilingualism.	- It requires the student to be reasonably proficient in the language to understand the concepts and the topics taught in class, otherwise the motivation will decrease, and the frustration will arise.
Task based language	- It's a tool that can be used to enhance all the language competence skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening. - Group work to enhance the learning and help each other. - Availability of the teacher to respond questions and help solving problems. - The students increase their confidence in the L2 by doing and presenting. - This method is often mixed with other ones.	- It emphasizes too much on tasks and communicative meaning instead of the correct use of the language. - It can affect the accurately language acquisition suffering from interlanguage, generating a barrier on the student's progress.
Natural Approach	- Only the target language is used in the classroom. - The students can speak when they feel ready and there is no pressure for it. - It is an effective way in creating learners to be competent in using the L2 communicatively.	- Not all the teachers are proficient enough on the foreign language. - It can be seen as time consuming by the students. - The student needs to have enough motivation to take the risk and start producing oral language.
Lexical Syllabus	- The student learned expressions used in the daily basis of the context of the target language. - The student learns the grammar and structure of the language by using the	- Difficulty for learning grammar - The language can't be divided into different units in the real life.

	logical models of dialect or patterns of language.	
Grammar-Translation Method	– It helps acquiring vocabulary. – Reading and writing skills are enhanced. – Grammar and form are the keys to the L2 acquisition.	– The method creates a teacher-centric classroom, with no opportunity for speaking practice. – The focus remains only on the mother-tongue and the target language remains ignored. – Method does not prepare students to communicate in real-world situations.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Reform Movement emphasized the importance of providing students with the tools of scientific discourse (Renau, 2016), and learning words and structure without practice was considered ineffective in language acquisition, advocating that we learn better when we are younger (Alvarez, 2018). Currently, foreign language teaching methodologies follow an eclectic approach, and teachers select activities and strategies from a range of methods to fulfil their teaching aims (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018). Scholars and teachers have come to the conviction that there is no completely effective method per se and have seen the importance of motivation in L2 acquisition. The ultimate goal is to improve students' long-term foreign language performance, guided and intrinsically stimulated by the joy of learning, rather than the burden of duty.

CLIL is considered an immersion method that takes place outside the context of the foreign language. Mixed with Visual Arts, especially in young students, it gives them the opportunity to make a difference in the future. Seen as an eclectic way of acquiring a new language, it would enhance the student's abilities, not only to learn a new language but to understand different cultures through it (Punzalan, 2018).

Motivational approaches to second language acquisition in young learners

Motivation is a key factor in second language acquisition. It combines the desire to learn an L2 and the positive attitudes and efforts invested in learning (Doiz et al., 2014; Dörnyei, 2005), thus positively influencing language learning outcomes and proficiency (Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022).

Researchers agree on differentiating two types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) that affect learner engagement and outcomes in L2 acquisition. Intrinsically motivated learners acquire language in a natural environment, focusing on their individual interest, and enjoying participation and engagement in new language development (Asmali, 2017). They are also more likely to continue their studies and improve their L2 proficiency over time (Jaysuhk, 2016). Extrinsic motivation involves participation in an activity not for the pleasure of doing it, but to achieve an external goal (reward or praise, or avoidance of punishment). External pressure can impede enjoyment in the classroom and would be the main factor in their learning problems.

Teaching an L2 at an early age is more likely to be successful if the educational practice focuses on learners' interests, the pressure to learn the language disappears, good communicative environment is generated where students feel comfortable and confident, without pressure or anxiety and with freedom of expression (Infante et al., 2014), and they can enjoy and show their creativity (Asmali, 2017; Meyer, 2015; Punzalan, 2018). In this sense, CLIL implementation could be a very good option, considering that it increases motivation, active participation in the learning process and confidence in using a language (Doiz et al., 2014; Infante et al., 2014; Korosidou & Griva, 2014; Navarro-Pablo & García-Jiménez, 2018; Martello, 2017).

Content and Language Integrated Learning

CLIL is an educational approach in which an additional language is used for teaching and learning both content and language (Mattheoudakis et al., 2014), in which the two are interconnected and the emphasis on one or the other is flexible and can change depending on the needs of the learner.

Unlike language immersion programs, in which all subjects are taught in the L2, CLIL takes place in the context of the L1 and only some subjects are taught in the foreign language (Renau, 2016). CLIL provides a contextualized and focused bilingual experience and gives the opportunity to learn a subject using a foreign language and acquire a foreign language through the study of a subject. Language is used as a medium rather than a regular L2 class, and the focus is on language skills at the expense of content subject matter.

CLIL stimulates linguistic, cognitive, and metalinguistic skills. Students are constantly practicing the language, learning it while trying to understand, process and exchange new information about a given content, which is not learned for the sake of learning but for the sake of using it (Mattheoudakis et al., 2014). In that sense, CLIL provides a natural environment for language learning, like native language acquisition.

Research that has compared the performance levels of CLIL/non-CLIL students has shown that CLIL students have better productive skills (speaking and writing) and motivation, and lower receptive skills (listening and reading) than non-CLIL students (Bruton, 2011; Navarro-Pablo & García-Jiménez, 2018; Mattheoudakis et al., 2014). Cooperation and teamwork are important elements for a successful implementation of this approach (McDougald, 2015). But the CLIL approach per se is not a "magic recipe" for successful L2 acquisition. Authors such as Anderson et al. (2015) have reviewed well-documented programs that have failed when teachers have not been well trained. Teacher training is an essential part for the success of this approach (Anderson et al., 2015; Bruton, 2011; Doiz et al., 2014; Ellison, 2019; Infante et al., 2014; Korosidou & Griva, 2014; Mattheoudakis et al., 2014; McDougald, 2015; Navarro-Pablo & García-Jiménez, 2018).

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that early exposure to L2 acquisition contributes to the development of understanding, cultural awareness, empathy and respect for others, while broadening children's horizons to perceive language as a product of culture (Byram, 2021). The CLIL approach at early ages has proven to be an effective immersion program with successful results. Its practice over the past two decades in elementary school has yielded positive results in the language skills of foreign language learners, and has focused primarily on language, content and learning skills, fluency, and eloquence of production rather than accuracy (Korosidou & Griva, 2014).

Visual Arts as a tool for the second language acquisition

The Visual Arts used as a tool for L2 acquisition, connect with the different intelligences of students (Punzalan, 2018), enhance motivation in language acquisition (Martello, 2017), foster creativity, participation, generate trust and contribute to social, cognitive, and emotional development with positive results (Al-Almri, 2011; Alvarez, 2018; Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Farokhi & Hashemi 2012; Martello, 2017; Punzalan, 2018). Images are an important component when teaching a language, they stimulate curiosity and provoke questioning and participation (Martello, 2017). Students enjoy making artwork and learn L2 well through play and experimentation.

Visual Arts create an anxiety-free environment in which students do not feel intimidated or fearful of making mistakes, therefore they are more willing to take risks and participate, two very important behaviours in language acquisition (Martello, 2017). Studies such as Punzalan's (2018), which have compared the Visual Arts approach with that of traditional discussion, have found a less active participation and struggle in the learning process of the latter as opposed to the former.

Other studies have shown how the presentation of non-verbal methods such as visual arts for communication and comprehension provides a platform for students to create mental images and enhance language development (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2012) improving the brain's ability to learn another cognitive domain (Punzalan 2018). But Visual Arts as a model of self-expression, also foster feelings, individual interests and personal expressions that should always be considered when stimulating creative practices in education (Al-Almiri, 2017). The use of this tool is beneficial in inducing students' emotional responses, reducing their affective filters, and promoting a subjective experience that has the potential to increase students' motivation and positive attitudes towards the study of the target language (Martello, 2017).

Visual Arts in the CLIL approach

Teaching content and form while providing CLIL increases the authenticity of the language in its learning and provides a "natural environment" in which learners can experience it as native speakers, have more opportunities to practice it and improve their language skills (Martello, 2017).

The arts, as a fundamental content area, are part of a comprehensive education (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2012). Studies of the CLIL approach using the visual arts to develop L2 have shown that when integrated with multiple subjects, the value of the content increases, and engaging arts experiences allow students to deepen their personal expression and visual culture and engage in new and varied activities while communicating their own ideas, eliciting a positive emotional response to learning and understanding others.

One of the most important advantages of blending visual art projects with CLIL is that the students can see the value of using a L2 in a real situation in which they make use of specific vocabulary related to motivating and creative activities (Meyer, 2015; Punzalan, 2018). Art projects foster collaborative work, engage students in real conversations, and allow them to integrate language skills that they can use to connect concepts and knowledge of different topics (Jiménez Morales, 2016).

There is a natural connection between the way children learn and the arts, considering that this teaching approach involving immersion in the Visual Arts can adapt to individual intelligences and utilize diverse approaches to learning. The educator needs to identify students' individual intelligence to promote their creativity and engagement with learning, understand the cognitive processes they use, and ultimately establish an environment that stimulates their interests (Alvarez, 2018), develops their multiple intelligences (Punzalan, 2018), and enhances their creative problem-solving skills through a universal language of artistic elements and images.

Working with the CLIL approach enhanced by art projects is an excellent way to increase students' knowledge, developing not only their communication skills but also their emotional and cultural awareness, having a better disposition to learn vocabulary and pronunciation in the target language (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2012). Through the arts children are exposed to the linguistic target for more hours in a free fun environment, while developing their critical thinking and aesthetic taste with a multicultural perspective (Alvarez, 2018).

Studies that have integrated Visual Arts into content areas other than language, such as mathematics and science, have reported promising findings in terms of positive impacts on students' behavior, creativity and academic performance (Alvarez, 2018; Martello, 2017; Punzalan, 2018). They have provided students with meaningful experiences and increased their problem-solving skills, understanding of concepts, and active participation in class (Korosidou & Griva, 2014, Renau, 2016).

Conclusions

This literature review has revealed the progressive need to learn a L2 in today's global context. Considering English as the lingua franca of the 21st century, many countries are trying to find

strategies to teach and train their citizens to acquire this skill and be competitive in the global market (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018). The aim of this research was to discover how the CLIL approach can benefit from the Visual Arts to improve L2 acquisition from an early age.

We have learned that no matter what language methodology is used to teach L2, the success of the project will be reflected in the amount of learner's motivation (Asmali, 2017). Teachers should strive to inspire and maintain children's motivation through interesting, fun, appropriate, and challenging activities. Obtaining high language proficiency is a difficult goal to achieve and motivation has been shown to play an important role in this pursuit, considering it as a personal attitudinal factor that has the power to determine the rate of success towards language learning (Asmali, 2017; Doiz et al., 2014; Martello, 2017; McDougald, 2015). However, the literature reviewed points to a stronger and more consistent evidence base for motivational and affective gains than for clearly measurable improvements in linguistic accuracy or long-term proficiency, which remain underexplored in many studies (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Macaro et al., 2018).

For L2 proficiency, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the language as much as possible (Alvarez, 2018). In the last 10 years, one of the most popular methodologies, especially in Europe, has been the CLIL approach (Bruton, 2011; Infante et al., 2014; Korosidou & Griva, 2014; Manola, 2015; Mattheoudakis et al., 2014); Navarro-Pablo & García-Jiménez, 2018; Renau, 2016). The literature review conducted clearly reveals the potential that CLIL has as a methodology that increases motivation in students, that challenges them with interesting content, and enhances an engagement in the L2 free of pressures on the precise use of the language and more engaged with the content, and with a very natural way of acquiring the L2 (Alvarez, 2018; Anderson et al., 2015; Doiz et al., 2014; Jiménez Morales, 2016; Korosidou & Griva, 2014; Martello, 2017). Nevertheless, many of the reviewed studies rely on small samples, short intervention periods and predominantly qualitative approaches, which limits the generalisability of their findings (Macaro et al., 2018).

Visual Arts, in turn, enhance young learners' motivation in L2 acquisition (Martello, 2017). Students acquire language by "doing" and "using" the target language constantly (Alvarez, 2018). Teaching English supported by Visual Arts encourages students to learn language through exposure to language and the use of rich discourse material (Martello, 2017).

It has become clear from our literature review that integrating the arts with other subjects has great benefits. Visual Arts can be integrated into the curriculum for L2 acquisition and help students improve their learning, thanks to the richness and variety of possibilities it has and the powerful emotional connection it evokes in students, which makes them feel free and safe in an environment that gives them the possibility to develop their different intelligences while learning content through an L2. "Children's art and imagination can open a door to their minds that one cannot easily access if they are limited by their English proficiency" (Alvarez, 2018, p. 1).

The findings in this literature research have supported our hypothesis and shown that L2 instruction using in a combined manner the CLIL approach and Visual Arts has the potential to increase language authenticity, promoting a "natural language environment" where students in a free L2 acquisition environment are more willing to take risks, make mistakes, and practice their language skills. Integrating art into the context of students' lives allows them to express their ideas in a creative way, while increasing their knowledge and communication skills. At the same time, the evidence remains largely indirect, as few studies establish causal relationships between arts-based CLIL interventions and long-term L2 development (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Winner et al., 2013).

In a CLIL approach blended with Visual Arts, students are immersed in a program that features the universal language of the arts, giving them the opportunity to access multiple intelligences, develop critical and conceptual thinking and enhance creative problem-solving skills, while increasing their knowledge and communication skills in the L2.

Research has shown that children's intrinsic motivation to learn is higher when they are younger (Anderson et al., 2015; Asmali, 2017; Copland et al., 2014; Doiz et al., 2014; Ellison, 2019; Jimenez 2016; Li et al., 2019; McDougald, 2015). Children at this educational stage have less external pressure and can enjoy and show more creativity with a more engaging activity plan related to their interests (Asmali, 2017). With the combined use of CLIL and Visual Arts it is easier to stimulate their cognitive factors through activities that allow them to use their special intelligences (Alvarez, 2018). However, despite these well-documented motivational benefits, the extent to which such approaches lead to sustained language learning gains remains insufficiently explored, highlighting the need for more robust and longitudinal research designs (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Nikula et al., 2016).

Students in primary education tend to be more motivated to learn an L2 than students in middle and high school (Doiz et al., 2014). Despite this recognised motivational advantage, research devoted specifically to young learners remains limited, particularly with regard to motivation as a mediating factor in L2 acquisition (Nikula et al., 2016). Although interest in this area has increased in recent years, the body of research is still incipient and empirical evidence remains scarce, as few studies adopt robust longitudinal or experimental designs capable of capturing sustained language learning effects (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, existing findings frequently fail to translate into classroom practice, highlighting the need for specialised teacher training, pedagogical guidance and adequate resources to ensure effective implementation (Bonnet, 2012).

The CLIL approach at early educational stages has proven to be a promising immersion model with generally positive outcomes; however, further efforts are required to refine implementation frameworks and, particularly, to strengthen teacher training programmes in order to fully exploit its pedagogical potential for L2 acquisition. The effectiveness of CLIL largely depends on the presence of committed and well-prepared professionals (Anderson et al., 2015; Doiz et al., 2014; Ellison, 2019; Infante et al., 2014) who are able to plan content and language in accordance with children's interests. This involves the use of engaging pedagogical tools that foster intrinsic motivation, encourage active participation, and promote the use of the target language as a tool to communicate and express ideas, opinions, thoughts, and feelings in a pressure-free environment, rather than as a primary object of formal accuracy. Such conditions are widely recognised in L2 acquisition research as facilitating language development by reducing affective barriers and increasing learners' willingness to use the L2 in authentic contexts (Ellis, 2015; Teimouri et al., 2019).

There remains considerable scope for research aimed at developing innovative educational strategies to improve the acquisition of the second foreign language and make it more accessible, motivating, efficient and effective for future multilingual generations (Bonnet, 2012; Bruton, 2011). Drawing on the systematised literature review conducted, the present study supports the pedagogical potential of combining CLIL and Visual Arts in L2 acquisition at early educational stages and, progressively, across subsequent levels of education (Anderson et al., 2015; Ellison, 2019; Korosidou & Griva, 2014; Martello, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a clear need for methodologically robust experimental research to provide empirical evidence that can inform and improve educational practice (Bonnet, 2012; Tedick & Wesely, 2015). Future research lines may build on motivational studies in CLIL contexts by incorporating a Visual Arts approach to L2 acquisition and examining variables such as active participation (speaking), vocabulary comprehension (listening), reading, writing, and pronunciation, in order to assess their contribution to overall L2 proficiency (Alvarez, 2018; Doiz et al., 2014; Navarro-Pablo & García-Jiménez, 2018). In this regard, priority should be given to experimental and longitudinal designs, while also addressing the need for teacher professional development and the contextual feasibility of these approaches in real classroom settings (Bonnet, 2012; Tedick & Wesely, 2015; Winner et al., 2013).

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