



1 ARMENIA

Are there any CLIL schools in Armenia?

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1.1 CLIL at Secondary School Level

'Perestroika' in the former Soviet Union and the fall of the notorious 'iron curtain' resulted in an enormous interest in foreign language learning. This subsequently resulted in acceleration of foreign language education in Armenia. For many years foreign languages had been viewed as one of the 'optional' subjects that could be taken both in high school and college. The national language in the former Soviet Union and now, after Armenia gained its independence in 1990, is considered to be Armenian. Russian, English, German and French have the official status of 'foreign languages'.

As paradoxical as it may seem, CLIL-type schools started in the former Soviet regime secondary schools, with some of the subjects being taught in an additional language, not usually the first language of the learners. These were set up in Armenia in the 1960s, English dominating over other foreign languages (French and German). The first CLIL School (so-called 'English-biased' school) was founded in 1966 in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, named after the great Armenian poet Yeghishe Tsharents. The 'Regulations, Law and Standards' book dating back to 1963, issued by the Ministry of Education (formerly called the 'Enlightenment Ministry') of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, states that this type of CLIL school is a polytechnic (labour-productive) secondary school, that aims to fulfil the task of a teaching 'communist behaviour' to the pupils, which meant 'to raise a highly educated pupil, physically and psychologically well developed, with an excellent knowledge a foreign language (English, German or French) who would be able to work skilfully in polytechnic-type production sites'.

This CLIL secondary school functioned under the auspices of the 'Enlightenment Ministry' of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and was directly financed by it. The pupils enrolled in this type of school started at the age of 7 and studied from grade 1 to grade 11. Subjects up to the 8th grade were taught in Armenian. After the 8th grade all the pupils had to take on CLIL. The following subjects were taught in English: the Literature of the studied language, Geography of Foreign Countries (Area Studies), and Modern History. The courses were linguistic-oriented and language-based and ended with a progress check/examination. In a CLIL school like this the number of pupils was 30, divided into 3 groups. The teachers in these special groups were appointed directly by the so-called

'Public Educational Department' within the Ministry of Education. The Curriculum of the Programme was established and approved by the Ministry of Education. All other subjects were taught in the national language according to the Curriculum established for an ordinary secondary school in Armenia. The Curriculum for a CLIL class of this type was specially designed for advanced foreign language learning.

The CLIL teachers did not have special training. They were mainly local language teachers specializing in the area they were supposed to teach. At that time within the Soviet regime, under the 'iron curtain' conditions, it would not have been reasonable to consider native speakers conducting classes in a Soviet secondary school. Special methodology for CLIL teaching did not exist, although the content should obviously have influenced the linguistic means chosen for teaching the specific content area. CLIL teachers were self-trained, working out an effective methodology for their classes. The materials they used were made locally and were self-developed. The CLIL teachers also had freedom of materials selection.

According to the Laws and Regulations established by the former Ministry of Education, CLIL teachers were paid 15% more than ordinary schoolteachers. The most skilful and intelligent teachers were selected for teaching CLIL classes. To improve educational progress in CLIL, different types of extra-curricular activities were organized for pupils, such as Olympiads, competitions, parties and readings. Some special extra funding was allocated to organize such activities. Moreover, there were special educational rooms (studies) such as a 'Foreign language study' equipped with a tape-recorder, tapes, records and other teaching aids. Besides compulsory Armenian and Russian literature, the library in this school should have contained literature in foreign languages too. There was a special funding to obtain the foreign literature, as this was difficult in Soviet times.

As amazing as it may seem, the librarian and the senior pioneer group leader, as well as having a high level of pedagogical education, should have undergone compulsory learning of a foreign language. The Ministry of Education of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) appointed the Principal (the Director) of this type of school. The Director of the School (an Armenian school with Advanced English Education) should have had compulsory education in the foreign language taught in the school. The vice-directors would have been involved in Foreign Language Programmes and were officially appointed by the Public Education Department within the Ministry of Education of the ASSR. Selection of pupils for CLIL schools was mainly done on the initiative of progressive parents who wanted their child to have advanced education.

After Armenia's independence the national policy was somewhat changed. Many Russian and English/CLIL schools were reconstructed into Armenian schools. The government policy shifted to the encouragement of national education. It was obviously and inevitably dictated by the raising of the national spirit.

1.2 CLIL at University Level

As has been mentioned, the 'Perestroika' process in the former Soviet Union, which influenced all the former Soviet Socialist Republics, Armenia included, eventually opened up opportunities for Armenian people, scholars in particular, to communicate with western scientists. It also provided them with the possibility to get involved in scientific discussions and professional talks, which promoted better understanding between the people and strengthened friendly relations between their countries. A strong need for professional communication in foreign languages increased as a result of two more historical events in the lives in Armenians: 1) the devastating earthquake of 1988; and 2) the vote for independence in 1990. The earthquake in 1988 opened the door of the country to people from all parts of the world, who hurried to help Armenia to deal with the aftermath, and to struggle side by side with Armenians for the restoration of both country and spirit. Independence gave Armenia an opportunity to build up its own relations with the rest of the world and to start collaborating with Western colleagues.

At this point, Armenians began to feel a strong need for interaction with their Western colleagues, e.g. scholars, architects, engineers, doctors, etc. Unfortunately, the communication process on the professional level was somewhat slowed down and rather complicated because it turned out that Armenia did not have scientists and other specialists who could function professionally in languages other than Russian and Armenian. Translators were not always able to convey adequately the scientific or professional significance and importance of the matters discussed. Moreover, foreign language teachers themselves, who worked as translators during the aftermath of the earthquake, realized that they experienced certain difficulties in all aspects of scientific communication. The weakest point in the foreign language teaching system became conspicuous in terms of a reliable linguistic background, and a mainly 'theoretical type' of knowledge proved to be insufficient as regards practical use of the language. The 'academic approach' to foreign language learning in the former Soviet educational system, which had been aimed at developing mainly reading and translating skills, had largely ignored speaking and writing activities, which prevented the learner conveying his/her ideas and thoughts in appropriate language. Armenian scholars were famous in the former Soviet Union for their great achievements in physics, astrophysics, biophysics, molecular biology and other technical and applied sciences, but they experience difficulties in trying to join the world community of scholars owing to foreign language communication problems.

With the globalization process the need for education in a foreign language increased incredibly. However, it would not be justifiable to state that no attention was paid to education in a foreign language in the former Soviet schools.

In Armenia, CLIL viewed as language-based teaching, started in the 1960s. Thus, in Yerevan State University, for example, content-based teaching in a foreign language has a long history. The methodology used was called 'methodology of teaching a foreign language to non- linguists'. A series of Soviet textbooks in foreign languages and based on content (mainly English for lawyers, physicists, mathematicians, biologists etc.) have been widely used. However, the majority of them were written in Russian as the language of instruction. Nowadays, in the Armenian independence context, in Institutes and Universities foreign language instructors in collaboration with content area experts compile technical dictionaries and textbooks on different branches of science and technology in foreign languages.

As for CLIL in its ideal sense, i.e. content experts teaching both the subject and the language, it is very popular. However, rare are the cases when Armenian experts teach both: these are the few teachers who have had a chance of receiving foreign language education abroad. Frequently, native speakers – experts in different branches of science – teach the subject to students in a foreign language. Now, with all the political and economic changes Armenia has undergone, double-focused education has become one of the urgent needs for Armenian people. With the overall globalization process, and Armenia's great wish to join the European community, education in a foreign language will eventually give opportunities to train a considerable army of Armenian scholars, freely functioning in foreign languages, who would be able to present their huge scientific potential on the international stage.