Introducing CLIL in Kazakhstan: Researching Beliefs and Perceptions of University Stakeholders

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Abstract

This article argues for the importance of taking into account stakeholders’ beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning foreign languages and CLIL, as they can be regarded as a pre-condition for the implementation of CLIL as a new pedagogical approach and finally for determining the success of teaching and learning through CLIL in the given context. The research was placed within a mixed research paradigm and relied on data obtained through the application of the QUAL-QUAN model, employing semi-structured interviews with administrators and surveys among 15 teachers and 207 students. Qualitative data underwent a two-step coding process: open coding and axial coding. Quantitative data from questionnaires were processed through two applications: SurveyMonkey and SPSS. Descriptive statistics were calculated. SPSS was used to identify the degree of association between different variables by cross-tabulating the results. Overall, the findings conclude that both teachers and students showed a high awareness of successful EFL teaching and learning practices, which provided them with more confidence and motivation for the application of CLIL as a new approach.

1 Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to declare its independence. These events forced the country to face the challenges of building a new state with an autonomous governing system, a new political ideology and a distinct national identity. Language policy became one of the central issues discussed at the governmental level, and soon a new language policy line emerged as Kazakhstan chose an orientation towards creating a multilingual society. Since then a systematic language policy has been implemented, supported by a series of official policy documents proclaiming multilingualism. The ‘Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan’ (1995) and the “Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Languages” (1997) declared Kazakh and Russian as the official languages. The cultural project “Trinity of Languages” of 2007, initiated by the President, laid the foundation of a Kazakhstan model of multilingualism claiming Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication and English as the language of successful integration into the global economy and community. Currently, the “State Programme of Development and Functioning of Languages of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020” (2011) prioritizes the provision of favourable conditions for the development of linguistic diversity and expects 10% of the population to know English by 2014, 15% by 2017 and 20% by 2020.

In the process of multilingual policy dissemination, Kazakhstan makes efforts to employ multilingual education as a tool for achieving a degree of linguistic proficiency in three languages among the population. The issues of multilingual education at tertiary level have become a focus of hot
debates as the system of higher technical institutions, encountering specific challenges, is nevertheless expected to prepare graduates who are linguistically qualified and competent to occupy desired positions in a global society. The “Conception of the Development of Foreign Language Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan” (2006) outlines the basic principles and structure of multilingual education for all levels of the education system and proposes a programme for non-linguistic institutions of higher education based on the level model of foreign languages acquisition. According to the Conception, the foreign language education curriculum should be based on the following formula B2+LSP, where B2 is the level expected to be reached by teaching/learning English as a Foreign Language according to the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (Council of Europe, 2002) and LSP is Language for Specific Purposes – the component of a professionally-oriented language course taught for a certain number of academic hours. Several questions arise in this regard, as to whether the proposed model can be, in fact, considered as multilingual, and whether this type of programme can provide sufficient results to meet the expected outcomes of the Conception that prioritises the development of communicative competence, cognitive and metacognitive skills, development of cultural awareness, the continuity of educational process, communicative orientation, problem-solving, student-oriented approach, orientation to international standards, creative and cognitive learning, self-development and autonomy, flexibility, and professional orientation as the basic principles.

In the current transitional situation where, in addition to the implemented level-model, universities have a certain degree of freedom in developing their own multilingual programmes, there is a necessity of researching and piloting the use of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), assuming that CLIL as the most dynamic, flexible and adoptable approach can be beneficial in terms of expected outcomes, further implications in the trilingual Kazakh-Russian-English model of education, being a catalyst of professional growth of all the stakeholders involved, expected and side-effect outcomes to benefit individuals, institutions as well as the state in general.

2 Literature review

2.1 Multilingual education

The term multilingual education was introduced by UNESCO in 1999. However, it was not until 2003 that a UNESCO declaration defined the term as “the use of at least three languages, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education” (Genesee, 2004, p. 17). Multilingual education can be defined as “education that aims to promote bilingual [or multilingual] competence by using both [or all target] languages as media of instruction for significant proportions of the academic curriculum” (Genesee, 2004, p. 17). Accordingly, the aim of multilingual education is “to teach content through a target language, i.e. the language the programme intends to teach” (Fortanet-Gomez, 2013). Garcia (2009) states that it is important to differentiate here between teaching second or foreign language programmes and multilingual education programmes. Even though both types of programmes tend to integrate language and content, to pay attention to explicit language instruction, and to use mainly or only the target language for instruction, multilingual education still has a broader general goal – “to educate generally, meaningfully, equitably, and for tolerance and appreciation of diversity” (Garcia, 2009, p. 6).

2.2 CLIL – Content and language integrated learning

CLIL, an umbrella term, was coined to describe the European approach to bilingual education (Garcia, Baetens Beardsmore, Cole, & Zakharia, 2009), which is usually defined as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 1). There are two prominent characteristics of CLIL that can be noted from this definition. The first feature is the use of an ‘additional language’. Although many researchers associate CLIL exclusively with foreign language (primarily English)
teaching and learning (Marsh, 2002), according to Eurydice’s (2006) report, “Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe,” CLIL fulfills two missions – to support local languages, and to reinforce teaching and learning foreign languages. In other words, CLIL embraces “all types of provision in which a second language (foreign, regional, minority, official language) is used to teach non-language subjects” (p. 8). This definition reveals CLIL’s almost unlimited potential in terms of combining teaching and learning various languages, including local and foreign languages. The second specific characteristic of CLIL is the dual focus on language and content, which best matches the multilingual educational goal of teaching content through a target language, as provided by Fortanet-Gomez (2013). As stated in Eurydice, the dual focus on language and content leads to the development of a special approach to teaching in which a non-language subject is taught not only in the foreign language but with and through it. In spite of the emergence of numerous specific features in teaching and learning foreign languages due to the introduction of CLIL, Coyle et al. (2010) argue that CLIL is not a new model of either language or content education; rather it is an innovative combination of both of them, assuming that each education system has all necessary basic elements for introducing CLIL, though disintegrated.

2.3 Stakeholders’ beliefs as a determining factor of multilingual education

It is important to put forward the idea that the dissemination of multilingual education and the introduction of the CLIL approach are both highly dependent on the existing individual and collective beliefs, and that these beliefs either support language learning practices in multilingual education or impede them (Garcia, 2009). The beliefs of stakeholders at different levels of the educational hierarchy have been described as “the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives” (Pajares, 1992, p. 307) or at least as a “predisposition to action” (Moscovici, 1975; Rokeach, 1972) and deserve special attention, as they may provide the basis for educational research by explaining how participants of the educational process understand and conceptualise the learning process itself and what they hope to achieve. Based on these findings, one may modify the current practices and predict the possible outcomes of differing multilingual education programmes.

Following Pajares’s argument, Li (2013), Hüttnner, Dalton-Puffer and Smit (2013), Jeffrion, Marcouyeux, Starkey-Perret, Narcy-Combes and Birkan (2014) have all researched educational beliefs in specific contexts. For example, Hüttnner et al. (2013) argue that studying beliefs is crucial, because it sheds light on “stakeholders’ reflection on the nexus between their beliefs, policy documents and specific educational practices” (p. 270). As defined by Huttner et al. (2013), “beliefs are lay theories of teachers and learners and constitute the complex cluster of initiative, subjective knowledge about the nature of language, language use and language learning, taking into account both cognitive and social dimensions, as well as cultural assumptions” (p. 269). Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) described the role of teachers’ beliefs as particularly powerful, as it helps teachers become aware of their teaching skills. Their systematic research explained how teachers gain such awareness through constant critical reflection and conscious self-enquiry in a number of practical awareness-raising activities such as case studies, self and peer observations, coaching and so forth. Although these studies provide insights into the relationship between beliefs and teaching/learning practices, there are few studies which 1) examine perceptions and beliefs about foreign language teaching/learning at three levels of the educational institution hierarchy (administrators, teachers and students) and 2) attempt to establish the relationship between the beliefs and the specific educational approach of CLIL.

3 Methodology

From the methodological perspective, the research was placed within a mixed research paradigm and relied on the data obtained through the application of the QUAL-QUAN model (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) with the equal emphasis on both methods and their concurrent use in the project. The research aimed at answering three research questions:
1) How is the role of foreign language learning understood by administrators, teachers and students in the multilingual context of Kazakhstan?
2) How do administrators, teachers and students conceptualise CLIL in terms of possible changes to teaching/learning process, challenges and benefits?
3) What is the relation between current teachers’ and students’ beliefs about teaching and learning and their willingness to take part in a CLIL-based programme?

3.1 Sample

3.1.1 Setting

The research was conducted in a typical state higher technical educational institution in Kazakhstan – Karaganda State Technical University (KSTU) educating approximately 12,000 bachelor, master and doctoral students. The Department of Foreign Languages of KSTU consisting of 27 teachers was responsible for delivering the curricula of foreign languages (predominantly English) according to the “Conception of the Development of Foreign Language Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan ” (2006) and the State Educational Standard. In addition to the main foreign language (FL) curricula, the university was participating in the pilot project allowing the development and approbation of a multilingual programme autonomously designed within the university.

3.1.2 Participants

Three groups of participants were identified as the target population of the research – administrators, teaching staff and students. The sampling of the administrative participants was limited by the number of administrators who had knowledge of and experience in English as a foreign language (EFL) or multilingual education, and who would thus be able to talk about language education and multilingualism-related issues. Four key administrators were chosen using the non-probability sampling strategy. The entire teacher population, totalling 24 full-time English teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages, was asked to participate. Fifteen teachers agreed to take part in the study by signing informed consents. About 300 students, chosen by a probability (randomised) sampling, were asked to take part in the survey. 207 agreed to participate. Table 1 summarises the participants’ reported years of experience in foreign language education and general language profile, outlining the general characteristics of the members of university community where the research took place.

Table 1. Participants’ profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Administrators (N=4)</th>
<th>Teachers (N=15)</th>
<th>Students (N=207)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average (mean) number of years of teaching/learning experience in foreign language education</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td>Frequency (%)</td>
<td>Frequency (%)</td>
<td>Frequency (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>14 (93.33%)</td>
<td>40 (19.32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (6.67%)</td>
<td>119 (57.49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>48 (23.19%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Data collection

The application of mixed methods research allowed the employment of several types of methods and instruments for the purpose of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, depending on the stages and aims of the data collection process.

Part I used semi-structured interviews with administrative members as qualitative data collection method. The interview protocols developed were similar for all the administrators and comprised 15 core questions. All the interviews were recorded with the prior notification and agreement of the participants.

Part II of the research, in which the teachers were the target population group, employed a survey as the data collection method. This allowed both quantitative and qualitative data to be obtained through the use of closed, open-ended, rating and Likert-scale questions. The 35 questions were organised in different sections: demographic and background information; beliefs about multilingualism; beliefs about CLIL; and beliefs about teaching and learning EFL.

Part III of the study, the survey of students, was conducted concurrently with the teachers’ survey. After being piloted and modified, the final version of questionnaire included 30 closed, open-ended, rating and Likert-scale questions arranged in sections similar to those in the teachers’ questionnaire.

3.3 Data analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire items, transcribed and translated from Russian into English, underwent a two-step coding process. The first step involved open coding in order to identify all the themes discussed by the participants answering a certain question. Afterwards, the frequency of each code was counted and stored by code in order to facilitate the production of the list of beliefs and understandings of participants, arranged from the most to the least frequently discussed. The next step of axial coding involved more thorough examination, comparison and categorisation of the themes and sub-themes, together with the calculation of their total frequencies.

Quantitative data from the closed questions and Likert-scale items in the questionnaires were processed through two different applications – SurveyMonkey and SPSS. The SurveyMonkey application automatically sorted the questionnaires by the completeness filter. As a result, 15 teachers’ questionnaires and 207 students’ questionnaires were selected and downloaded for further analysis. Although the sample size was planned in advance and the research managed to reach a relatively high response rate of about 62% and 69% for teacher and student participants, respectively, the data analysis was impeded by the small sample size of the teacher population with only 15 members. In spite of the fact that the figure was not entirely representative and there was a significant difference between teacher and student samples, the analysis was based on the comparison of the frequencies of responses and percentages. The next stage of data reduction was coding. All closed answers were post-coded; a code number was assigned to each answer to a survey question through SPSS application. Descriptive statistics such as scores for means and standard deviations were calculated. Finally, SPSS was used to identify the degree of association between different variables by cross-tabulating the results of beliefs dimensions with teachers’ and students’ reported willingness to participate in the CLIL-based programme.

4 Findings

4.1 Research question 1

4.1.1 Administrators

The analysis of administrators’ responses about the necessity and purpose of learning EFL in Kazakhstan generated four main groups of beliefs, which can be represented by the following statements (see Table 2):
Introducing CLIL in Kazakhstan: Researching Beliefs and Perceptions

Table 2. Administrators’ beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL in Kazakhstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. English should be learned as it opens new perspectives for further education and internship opportunities.</td>
<td>Interviewee A, C, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English should be learned as it allows one to obtain a prestigious and well-paid job in a foreign company.</td>
<td>Interviewee A, B, C, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English should be learned as it is the policy of the state.</td>
<td>Interviewee B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. English should be learned for professional reasons – opportunity to communicate with colleagues abroad, become visiting professor, publish articles, etc.</td>
<td>Interviewee C, D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Teachers

Given the significant role that teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism and foreign language learning can play in classroom practices, it was important to understand how teachers conceptualise the significance of foreign language learning. The reflections of the participants of the survey on the purpose and necessity of studying EFL in the multilingual context of Kazakhstan are summarised in Table 3:

Table 3. Teachers’ beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL in Kazakhstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL</th>
<th>Respondents (N=15)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. English should be learned as it is necessary condition for obtaining a prestigious, decent and well-paid job.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English should be learned as it increases the chance to study abroad.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English should be learned as it has status of the language of international communication.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. English should be learned as it is a present requirement facilitating the process of globalisation.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. English should be learned for professional reasons, such as opportunities to teach English, participate in seminars, discussions, international communication with colleagues abroad, to take part in projects.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. English language learning provides opportunities for further personal development and skills improvement.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. English should be learned as it is becoming more important for the country’s development.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. English should be learned for traveling.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. English should be learned as it is interesting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Students

Although only half of the respondents believed in multilingualism in the context of Kazakhstan, 71 respondents (36%) considered knowledge of English to be important. The most common beliefs about the necessity and purpose of knowing English among students are presented in the Table 4.
Table 4. Students’ beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL in Kazakhstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs about necessity and purpose of learning EFL</th>
<th>Respondents (N=207)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. English should be learned as it will contribute to the development of the country, economic growth, cooperation with other countries, development of international communication, and increase in the competitiveness of the state and its recognition on the world’s arena.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. English should be learned as it will bring individual benefits such as self-development, opportunity to study abroad, opportunity to read literature or watch films in English, communicate with English-speaking people, improve personal status, travel abroad, etc.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English should be learned as it is as it has the status of the language of international communication or the language of global community, e.g. language of business, communication, and international events.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. English should be learned as it provides more work opportunities (competitiveness of job seekers and specialists, opportunity to work for foreign companies, get well-paid job).</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. English should be learned as it is the policy of the state fulfilling the main strategy of the government - to educate a literate and culturally aware population, allowing development of education.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Research question 2

A set of interview questions for administrators and open-ended questions for teachers and students were focused on eliciting how the CLIL approach is conceptualised by university administrators, teachers and students in terms of possible changes, challenges and benefits. The administrators, teachers and students were approached with the following questions:

- If CLIL was introduced in your university, what would it change?
- If CLIL was introduced in your university, what challenges would it bring?
- If CLIL was introduced in your university, what benefits would it bring?

First and foremost, it was important to understand if participants of the research had any previous experience in managing, teaching or studying in multilingual education programme, specifically CLIL. The interview and survey data revealed that three out of four administrators were familiar with the CLIL approach; 87% of teachers had heard of or encountered the notion of CLIL in their teaching or research practices. The least informed about CLIL were the students, only 67% of whom indicated that they were familiar with this approach. To minimise the bias of administrators, teachers and students’ responses and avoid the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of CLIL, all the participants were provided with the definition of CLIL, emphasising specific features of it such as the dual focus on content and language.

4.2.1 Administrators

The most commonly stated beliefs about possible changes in the university with the introduction of CLIL were related to the resources required for CLIL-based programme. Discussing teaching resources, administrators thought about the necessity of upgrading teachers’ professional skills and increasing language proficiency through participation in teaching training programmes and language training programmes by both subject and language teachers (Interviewees A, B, C, D). According to Interviewee C, subject teachers were believed to have good language potential which had not been developed. However, even this potential could not allow them to teach through CLIL as they were not able to use the language component properly. Language teachers in their turn were believed to be capable of teaching through CLIL if they obtained a degree in a technical area (Interviewee C),
became more motivated for professional growth (Interviewees A, B, C), and became more oriented to the practical language needs of students, for example, “start teaching English in real laboratories with real equipment” (Interviewee C). These changes were seen as necessary prerequisites for the programme’s success.

Closely related to the most common beliefs about possible changes, all the administrators envisioned the most significant CLIL-related challenge to be the lack of teaching training and language learning programmes for teaching staff. However, Interviewees B and D commented that if the university had at least one specialist in multilingual education, it would be able to develop a quality programme. The lack of proper teaching/learning materials was believed to be another great obstacle for CLIL. Although administrators provided their visions of possible challenges relating to CLIL implementation, all of them, consciously or not, provided several possible solutions for the outlined problems. It was explicitly stated by all the administrators that any type of multilingual programme, including CLIL, would work in cases where all the participants were eager to join the programme and work hard.

Administrators’ beliefs about possible benefits of CLIL could be classified as benefits for the university, benefits for teachers, and benefits for students. At the institutional level, it was believed that CLIL could impact the status of the university, as a successful language programme would increase the linguistic proficiency of both teachers and students, and that would in turn impact the integration of the university into the world’s educational sphere through student and teacher mobility (Interviewee C, D), access to the world’s most current knowledge and achievements (Interviewee B), and an increase in publications in English. At the teaching staff level, CLIL was perceived as a great catalyst for professional growth that could inspire many teachers to get additional qualifications or take additional professional training in teaching (Interviewees B, C, D), which was closely connected with the concept of life-long education (Interviewee D), and bring about closer cooperation between subject and language teachers, which is not happening at the moment (Interviewees A, B, C). Finally, administrators envisioned benefits from CLIL for students whose language proficiency would increase considerably (Interviewee A, C) and who would acquire better job opportunities by developing more practical communicative skills for work-related needs (Interviewee A, C). On a final note, Interviewee D emphasised that CLIL’s main principle of dual focus teaching/learning was exactly what the university was trying to achieve.

4.2.2 Teachers

First, 27% of teachers conceptualised CLIL as a new approach, which will require the current methods and approaches of foreign languages teaching to become more student-oriented and context-based. Second, 40% of respondents associated CLIL with very interesting and necessary experience that would contribute to the improvement of both teachers and students’ language skills and increase students’ motivation. CLIL was generally regarded as a beneficial experiment for both students and teachers, as it allows the broadening of horizons. However, 20% of the surveyed were not sure about the changes that CLIL might bring.

Thinking about CLIL in terms of possible challenges, 27% of teachers indicated the choice of appropriate methodology and resources as the most significant obstacle. 20% of respondents talked about the lack of language and subject-related knowledge to work in CLIL. Finally, just more than six percent of respondents related challenges of CLIL to the challenges of the development of new curricula and syllabii. Others emphasised the amount of time needed for preparation, hard work, and the necessity to acquire new skills.

In spite of possible challenges they envisioned, all the teacher respondents believed that the introduction of CLIL would be a very beneficial experience. The majority believed that the implementation of CLIL would positively affect their self-development. 20% of the respondents associated positive effects of CLIL with the improvement of their own language proficiency as well as the improvement of general knowledge and the enrichment of professional experience.
4.2.3 Students

About 50% of all respondents (104 out of 207) associated CLIL with very positive changes beneficial for themselves and the university. Among those who positively perceived possible changes related to CLIL 60% of students expected CLIL to facilitate the learning of English and help them achieve much higher language proficiency. Just more than 15% of respondents believed that the introduction of CLIL could contribute to the re-definition of the status of the university, including an upgraded level of education and the appearance of new specialists with high language proficiency. Among other significant changes that students pointed to was an increase of motivation for learning languages (4%), a change in attitudes to languages (3%), a change in the level of thinking (3%), a change in the cultural level of students (2%), as well as a change in the assessment system (1%).

29% of respondents see low language proficiency as the main challenge to the CLIL implementation process. In addition, 11% of the surveyed students emphasised that, due to the insufficient language proficiency, there could be a lack of understanding or misunderstanding between teachers and students that could affect understanding of the subject matter (6%), understanding of both language and subject (2%), students’ performance and results (2%), the level of education (2%), and the educational experience (2%). However, the number of participants who claimed that CLIL would necessarily bring difficulties does not exceed the number of those who believed in the success and benefits of CLIL-based programme.

26% of students who commented on the benefits of CLIL assumed that the greatest benefit of CLIL would be in terms of language proficiency gains. About 26% of respondents believed that participation in a CLIL programme would bring long-term benefits, allowing students to continue their education abroad or become highly qualified specialists who will be in demand.

4.3 Research question 3

To approach the research question 3 in all-round way, the last part of the questionnaires for teachers and students was designed in the form of rating scales – statements that teachers and students were offered to rate according to a Likert scale. 20 statements for teachers were developed based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD, 2013) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the CLIL Unit Checklist (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 84–85) and divided into four sections on “Professional Competence,” “Nature of Teaching/Learning Foreign Language,” “Classroom Practices,” and “Professional Activities.” 25 statements for students were developed based on the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI; Horwitz, 1985, pp. 339–340) and the CLIL Unit Checklist (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 84–85) and grouped in five categories relating to “Foreign Language Aptitude,” “The Difficulty of Language Learning,” “The Nature of Language Learning,” “Learning and Communication Strategies,” and “Motivation and Expectations.”

4.3.1 Teachers

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, distributions, means and standard deviations is presented in Table 5. The histograms generated for each set of beliefs showed normal distribution and relatively low indices of deviation (max SD=2.43, min SD=1.82) indicating that stated beliefs were generally shared among all the participants, which contributed to the consistency and validity of responses. The computed means of teachers’ responses by category demonstrated overall strong beliefs by teachers in successful practices with the most prominent scores in the Professional Awareness and Professional Competences sections. As the study was concerned with establishing the interrelationship between two sets of variables, namely beliefs about current practices, by category, and stated willingness of participation in CLIL-based programme, the null hypothesis was formulated and tested.
A chi-square test was run to detect whether there was a significant association between two categorical variables, by section. The cross-tabulated data showed that the assumption for chi-square had not been met, which indicated that the sample was too small and the data were not enough to provide sufficient number of cases falling into each category. However, the interpretation of row and column percentages provided some important insights. Firstly, there were no participants in the survey who did not want to participate in a CLIL-based programme. Secondly, those who showed the most interest in participating in CLIL tended to score in the professional competence category 18 to 23 points out of the maximum 25, in the nature of teaching category 17 to 23, in classroom practices 17 to 22, and in professional activity 18 to 23.

The scatter plotting of compared variables showed some general trend in the data, such as: the higher the index of teachers’ beliefs, the higher the stated desire of the respondents to take part in a CLIL programme. However, this trend could not be generalised for all four categories, as differences were revealed both among categories as well as within them. Teachers’ beliefs about professional competence followed the general trend; however, the teachers with the maximum score in this group did not express the strongest desire to take part in CLIL. The teachers’ beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning compared to their willingness to take part in CLIL did not show any type of association, as those who wanted to take part in CLIL possessed different levels of beliefs.

The association between beliefs variables, by category, and the willingness of participants to take part in a CLIL-based programme was tested with the one-tailed test of Pearson correlation. Next, in order to analyse the correlation between the strength of teachers’ beliefs and their interest in CLIL, a linear regression study was carried out. The CLIL willingness was chosen as dependent variable y and strength of beliefs by category as independent variable. For each linear regression R squared coefficient was generated. The results of the Pearson correlation and linear regressions are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of teachers’ beliefs, by category, and correlation coefficients between stated beliefs and willingness to participate in CLIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of researched beliefs about teaching and learning EL</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Pearson correlation (r)</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Competence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.07</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Teaching/Learning FL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.93</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Practices</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.07</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.80</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to participate in CLIL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the coefficients presented in the last two columns of Table 5, the teachers’ willingness to take part in CLIL is positively correlated with all four categories of teachers’ beliefs. The three categories of beliefs, namely professional competence, professional activities and classroom practices showed the strongest correlations (r=0.79, r=0.60, r=0.50), but any strong claims of statistical significance must be rejected due to the small sample size. R squared coefficient provided evidence for positive correlation, though weak.

4.3.2 Students

Similar to the study of the teachers’ beliefs, data obtained from the students’ questionnaires were processed through SPSS to analyse frequencies, distributions, means and standard deviations. The histograms generated for each set of beliefs showed normal distribution and the indices of deviation ranging from max SD=3.13 to min SD=2.26 in the Motivation and Expectations and Foreign Language Aptitude sections, accordingly. The obtained means indicated that students’ overall under-
standing of FL learning was above average and was commonly shared by all the students. The highest means were calculated for two categories: beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning (M=18.85) and beliefs about Motivation and Expectations (M=19.47).

A chi-square test showed that correlation was statistically significant (p<0.001). The next stage of analysis included a one-tailed test of correlation between two variables: students’ current beliefs, by section, and their eagerness to participate in a CLIL-based programme. To measure the correlation, an SPSS correlation matrix was used. The research had a directional hypothesis that the stronger the beliefs of participants about foreign language learning, the higher their willingness to participate in the CLIL-based programme, and thus the higher the chance for a CLIL-based programme to be successfully implemented. Table 6 shows sample size (N), mean scores (M), standard deviations (SD), Pearson coefficient (r) and R square for the five categories of researched beliefs.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of students’ beliefs, by category, and correlation coefficients between stated beliefs and willingness to participate in CLIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of researched beliefs about teaching and learning EL</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Pearson correlation (r)</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language Aptitude</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>17.49</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Difficulty of Language Learning</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>17.13</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of Language Learning</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>18.85</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Communication Strategies</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>17.02</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and Expectations</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>19.47</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to participate in CLIL</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the nature of the two variables correlated (eagerness for CLIL and strength of students’ beliefs), a linear regression study was done between the CLIL eagerness and the mean strength of beliefs by category for all the individuals that indicated interest in CLIL scoring particular value. The equation and R squared values of the fitting are presented in the Table 6. According to the presented Pearson correlation coefficient, the most significant statistical correlation was revealed between the students’ beliefs about Motivation and Expectations and their eagerness to take part in CLIL. Calculated R² showed that the correlation was positive and strong with almost perfect correlation between Motivation and Expectations beliefs and willingness for CLIL.

5 Discussion

The study focused on beliefs about FL teaching/learning and CLIL to better understand the ascribed role and the status of English, beliefs about EFL teaching and learning in the context of a non-English-speaking country, and stakeholders’ beliefs and perceptions about CLIL as possible preconditions of the implementation of CLIL as a new pedagogical approach. The overall design of the study, including the three research questions and selected participants, allowed sufficient data to be obtained, which contributed to the understanding of the researched phenomena, on one hand, and provided new understandings for future research, on the other hand.

The study revealed the role of English as a lingua franca in the Kazakhstan model of multilingualism. Taking into account the non-English-speaking reality of the Kazakhstan society and subsequent limited exposure and necessity for the stakeholders to use English on a daily basis for communication purposes, the majority of the stakeholders in the researched educational context nevertheless indicated the importance of learning EFL. The majority of the research participants across all three groups were convinced of the necessity of learning English, which is strongly associated with the state language policy and state benefits, and prospective job and study opportunities at the individual level. Being influenced by the state policy, the participants tended to explain learning foreign languages as a factor contributing to easier communication and understanding among people.
The revealed positive stakeholders’ beliefs and perceptions can be assigned to the specific ideological context and elaborated language policy in Kazakhstan that seek to support trilingualism in the given context. According to the law, the learning of Kazakh and Russian is obligatory in all schools and universities; and the access to Kazakh-medium education is guaranteed at all levels of the system. All the schools as well as higher education institutions are expected to support the implementation of the government’s trilingual policy and provide sufficient Kazakh-, Russian-, and English-medium programmes. For example, in 2000, 32% of university students were studying primarily through the medium of Kazakh and 68% primarily through Russian. However, in 2009, the distribution was already notably different: 50.7% were studying through Russian, 47.6% primarily through Kazakh, and 1.6% primarily through English (Agency of the Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2013).

Even though the state language policy and ideology have managed to create positive attitudes among the stakeholders about language learning and language use as preconditions of successful multilingual education implementation, a lot depends on the type, design and the management of the specific multilingual educational programme. In other words, a lot depends on the methodological and pedagogical practices related to the programme.

The research described contributes to building an understanding of how CLIL was perceived and viewed by the stakeholders of the higher technical educational institution, which, according to Coyle et al. (2010), corresponds to the building of a “shared vision” of CLIL. Based on the analysis of the responses to three open-ended questions to all the participants, a clear majority of the participants claimed that the introduction of CLIL as a new approach would inevitably result in changes. Many of the participants stated fears and concerns about the challenges of CLIL relating to the necessity of adopting new methods of teaching or significantly changing materials and curriculum or the need to urgently cover the gap in language proficiency among teachers and students. All these challenges do exist, as explained by the authors, but CLIL is neither a new type of language education nor a new type of content education, and all the basic elements already exist in the system. The main challenges may be related to the amount of time stakeholders are willing to devote to assembling these elements to make the model work in context, as suggested by the general administrators. The majority of the administrators, teachers and about half of the students nevertheless expressed an interest in taking part in a CLIL-based programme due to the numerous benefits that CLIL may provide and in spite of the huge amount of preparatory work that CLIL may require.

There are several significant findings in the last part of the research. First, the research revealed a relatively high convergence of beliefs and perceptions about FL teaching among teachers and about FL learning among students. Second, both teachers and students demonstrated an awareness of EFL teaching and learning practices which tended to be very high. Third, the study established an interrelation between stakeholders’ beliefs about EFL teaching and learning and their willingness to take part in the CLIL-based programme.

Overall, the findings conclude that both teachers and students showed a high awareness of successful EFL teaching and learning practices, which provided them with more confidence and motivation for the application of this new approach.

6 Conclusion

The research has provided data contributing to the understanding of the linguistic reality in Kazakhstan, within which the new generation is being raised and educated. Kazakhstan as the country with a top-down multilingualism-oriented language and language education policies tends to create favorable conditions for teaching and learning mainly three languages – Kazakh, Russian and English. The participants’ responses suggest that the government is implementing a balanced language policy and ideology, which have managed to create an atmosphere of tolerance and respectful attitude to the language diversity by effective language management and language ideology measures.

The research into the stakeholders’ understanding of the role of EFL in the given context has revealed that the state promotes a policy which concurs in part with grassroots’ beliefs and perceptions of the importance and practical applicability of FL learning. Individuals’ beliefs of why one
should learn a language are embedded in the social and cultural context in which they find themselves. At the same time, those beliefs are part of their identity, of the way they see themselves and interact with the world. Those beliefs can evolve and change over time, but cannot be ignored, as they always influence the motivations for learning and development, thus determining the success of the undertaken activity. The research has revealed that participants’ attitudes to learning EFL are equally influenced by internal (e.g. personal and professional development) and external factors (e.g. social value, state policy, and globalisation).

This study attempted to investigate the possibility of applying CLIL based on the current beliefs and perceptions of stakeholders at three levels in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. One may argue that, at its current transitional and formation stage, the Kazakhstan education system in general might not be ready for the fundamental changes in foreign language education due to 1) poor management, 2) lack of knowledge and substantial research, 3) under-resourcing, or 4) the overall reluctance of the stakeholders to change. However, this article argues that stakeholders’ beliefs and perceptions about teaching and learning FLs and CLIL shed light on how stakeholders generally perceive language education situated in a certain multilingual reality. This can be regarded as a precondition for the implementation of CLIL as a new pedagogical approach and finally for determining the success of teaching and learning through CLIL in this context.

Narrowing down the process of building multilingualism to the specific educational institution and specific pedagogical approach, the research has revealed that, being aware of all possible challenges and obstacles of under-resourcing, administration and teaching staff agreed about the possibility of the CLIL-based programme implementation, while the majority of the participants in all three researched groups expressed an interest in taking part in CLIL, motivated by the possible positive outcomes. The research also revealed the stakeholders’ willingness to participate in CLIL supported by their beliefs about the practical side of teaching and learning FLs that I suggest should be regarded as an important indicator of the preparedness of the system to introduce a new pedagogical approach.

6.1 Limitations

The main limitation of the research concerns the part of study that employed Likert-scale statements as the main instrument of data collection. First of all, the internal consistency and reliability of the Likert-scale statements developed for investigating a certain phenomenon should be discussed. As no reliable questionnaire that fitted the purposes and needs of such research was found in the literature, I had to adapt and combine several questionnaires – TALIS, BALLI and the CLIL Unit Checklist. Although the design of the questionnaire followed the structure of the original questionnaires, which provided main groups of belief statements, while incorporating some statements about basic principles of CLIL as methodological approach into these questionnaires, I realised that the categories lost a certain degree of internal consistency and focus, which diminished the validity and reliability of the obtained results. Second, the inclusion of positive and negative statements in the questionnaire complicated the process of data analysis as certain mathematical tools had to be applied in order to standardise the data for further analysis. Moreover, as the Likert scale was expected to produce numerical data for further statistical analysis, there occurred a problem of intervals assignment. Assuming that classical Likert-scale category descriptors from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” are genuinely equal, they were assigned with equal intervals that could nevertheless disagree with the reality.

6.2 Future research

This topical and concise research has no analogy, as it is the first mixed methods research investigating beliefs about EFL teaching and learning situated in the context of higher technical education in Kazakhstan. Although engaging and thought-provoking, such exploratory research in terms of context, central concepts, choice of methodology and participants needs more future investigations. The replications of this study with more participants in both national and international contexts could
help to further explore the role of and the interplay between the beliefs about multilingualism, and EFL teaching and learning as preconditions of CLIL implementation. In this regard, further research may be conducted in the field of policy-making and policy-delivery mechanisms that condition the interrelation between top-down state language policy and ideology, and grassroots’ initiatives to improve existing FL practices. Moreover, further research may be directed towards investigation of the origin of educational beliefs in the Kazakhstan context and their impact on the implementation of certain methods which underpin the pedagogical and methodological orientation of the research. Next, providing a very interesting field for the research related to multilingual education in the Kazakhstan context may serve as a platform for experimental research or pilot-study projects in bilingual, multilingual and FL education. Thus, further research could focus on the investigation of possible multilingual education trajectories dependent on the perceptions of the stakeholders. An interesting area for further research may be the role and correlation between general human beliefs and specific educational beliefs, regarded as a human capital which may condition the change.

6.3 Practical implications

Despite the limitations described above, the findings of this study have several key implications. Due to the interdisciplinary approach adopted in the project, combining analysis of various educational stakeholders’ beliefs, the research findings may be insightful for researchers working in the fields of sociolinguistic theory, theory of multilingualism, general theory of language learning, and motivation theory. The findings of this study may be interesting for explaining the nature of people’s beliefs and perceptions situated in the context of policy implementation theory. As the research adopted a pragmatic approach, the results of the project may contribute to improvements in practices of contextualised language teaching and learning by pilot-studying and the subsequent introduction of CLIL. Due to the revealed gaps in management, the research can inform administrators in higher educational institutions in their efforts to develop or improve language education management or language policy implementation at the institutional level. The research findings may also contribute to the development of teacher training programmes, as they explain the importance of the development and role of certain educational beliefs that can bring about significant change.

References


