

“Travelling to Greek Neighborhoods with English”: Design and Implementation of a CLIL Program at a Primary School

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an innovative approach which attempts to comprise holistic features, focusing on the meaning and at the same time providing opportunities for purposeful language use (Dalton – Puffer, 2007). Based on the triptych language of learning, language for learning and language through learning- this program aims at creating innovative educational escape rooms, in order to adopt CLIL, to develop skills in the target language (English) and at the same time to emphasize context and meaning. The program -designed for 5th grade students of a Primary School in Northern Greece- was piloted for 5 months, giving them the opportunity to “travel to Greek neighborhoods” and engaging them in the subjects of geography, history and culture, using English, -with great enthusiasm. Various web2 tools, videos, games, websites were incorporated in the escape rooms to provide authentic material so as to enhance authentic communication in the English language and also to use different types of context so as to support language and content knowledge. The program was assessed and evaluated using alternative ways and the results indicated the positive effects of CLIL on the students’ skills in English (TL) along with the significantly developed familiarization with the content through a creative, enthusiastic, motivating setting for students promoting active involvement and participation.

Keywords:

CLIL, Escape Rooms, Language Learning, Digital Educational Games, Pilot Study

Introduction

Defining CLIL

The term (CLIL) Content Language Integrated Learning was adopted in the 1990s as an umbrella term representing the attempt to use foreign language as a tool when learning a subject, so as language and subject to have a “joint curricular role” (Coyle, 2006; Eurydice, 2006; Marsh, 2012). It is a generic term describing “any learning activity where language is used as a tool to develop new learning from a subject area or theme”, (Coyle et al., 2009).



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Nowadays, CLIL is considered to be an innovative approach practiced for decades in order to comprise holistic features, so as to emphasize on meaning as well as on content. Research proved the positive effects of CLIL on the target language (Griva & Deligianni, 2017a; Korosidou & Griva, 2013; Lasagabaster, 2008), as well as on the successful outcomes when implementing CLIL programs to young as well as to adult language learners (Coyle et al., 2009; Eurydice Report, 2006). Therefore, CLIL may be described as an influential, flexible and dynamic approach that can be used when teaching foreign language learners and can be adopted by all levels of education -from primary to secondary as well as university education (Coyle et al., 2009). CLIL may be modified to be used following students' age, abilities, needs and interests as it is suitable for various levels of complexity for different sectors (Coyle et al., 2009); that is mainly because of the various ways with which teachers may decide to adopt CLIL: from weak/soft CLIL to hard/strong CLIL, depending mostly on the subject taught through the target language (Ball, 2016), or even from 10-20 minutes language showers to a partial immersion model (where only 50% of the curriculum subject is taught in the target language), -according to the CLIL manual for E.U. for the CLIL4u project.

CLIL can be different for learners in many ways, according to Coyle, Holmes and King (2009); it surely is more interesting than a grammar-based lesson and therefore more motivating in terms of language learning. It may also be less conventional even for content learning since knowledge and skills can be transferred from one school subject to another and this may in fact be less time consuming and more interactive as it can have positive effects on communication -even cultural and intercultural communication-, especially when digital tools and information technologies are incorporated. Scaffolding and critical thinking also help CLIL learners feel better in terms of life skills and problem solving (Coyle et al., 2009).

Thus, benefits for language learning as well as for content learning, together with the need for higher levels of language competence and the promotion of multilingualism in Europe (Griva & Semoglou, 2013; Commission of the European Communities, 2008) have therefore placed innovative learning and teaching approaches into the curriculum. Nowadays, CLIL has been acknowledged as an innovative dual focused educational approach that has been gaining acceptance in Europe. CLIL is considered to be one of the main trends in education across Europe regarding Primary and Secondary education. However, Denmark, Finland, Turkey and Greece are the only countries that have not yet fully incorporated CLIL in public education, according to Eurydice (Eurydice, 2012). In Greece, Thessaloniki, a state experimental

Primary School -supervised by the school of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki- following the contemporary European trend, in 2010-2011, started implementing CLIL from grade 1 to grade 6. In addition, CLIL programs have been piloted ever since in Greece in an attempt to increase the limited number of hours of English taught in the school curriculum as well as to provide input and outcomes for educational research carried out by state and private schools and/or teachers so as to determine and define the benefits for students.

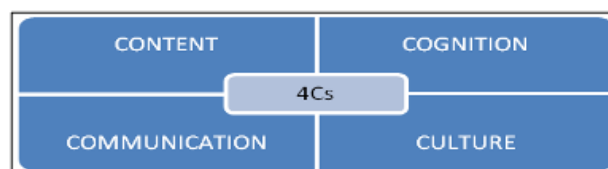
CLIL in action

In addition, CLIL may as well involve projects, acting, puppets, science experiments, new technologies, etc. and in this way the curriculum subjects together with the language classes may be mutually enriched and further developed (Coyle, 2006); in this multisensory and multimodal way students may be easily stimulated -through meaningful and authentic learning materials- and engaged in authentic communication (Griva & Semoglou, 2013; Meyer, 2010).

However, according to several researchers, creating and adopting CLIL materials may not always be an easy task for teachers opting to successfully implement CLIL approach (Korosidou & Griva, 2013). Therefore, Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols (2008), in their attempt to ensure quality of learning, indicated that CLIL teachers need to consider the following characteristics: multiple focus, safe and enriching learning environment, authenticity, active learning, scaffolding and co - operation.

Also, in order for CLIL teachers to design and implement successfully their own program, the following 4 principles -and the way they are connected- need to be taken into account: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture (Coyle et al., 2009).

Picture 1.
The 4Cs Curriculum



However, Competence, a 5th principle has recently been added to enhance the Cs framework and therefore, nowadays, the 5Cs curriculum has been introduced and mentioned -Content, Cognition, Communication, Culture, Competence-, when planning and implementing a CLIL program (Ball, 2016).

Also, when planning a detailed CLIL lesson, -based on the threefold role of language: language of learning, language for learning, and language through learning- teachers can adopt the 3As tool:

Analyse, Add, Apply, (Coyle, 2005), which operates in three stages:

- Stage 1: Analyse (Analyse the content for the language of learning).
- Stage 2: Add (Add language content for learning).
- Stage 3: Apply (Apply the content of language through learning).

Moreover, the Matrix mentioned above is considered to be an important CLIL tool regarding development of materials and their evaluation; it can be adopted in order for teachers to determine the way cognition and language are interrelated as well as to monitor and audit the developed educational materials (Coyle, 2005).

The CLIL pyramid, designed to visualize the quality of CLIL in terms of the Os, when creating materials and designing activities, is also a different tool intended to build quality materials, starting with the content and the subject (Meyer, 2010).

Considering the CLIL tools mentioned above, it can be noticed that they may be used mainly for guidance and support in order to form a learning route determined by the content, by the curriculum subject in an attempt to serve the dual CLIL aim according to which content together with language learning may be integrated in an innovative, flexible and dynamic way.

Aims, characteristics and principles of CLIL can be strongly highlighted and emphasized when combined with techniques and environments that focus on holistic learning, learning through experience, authentic communication, critical thinking, scaffolding and higher order thinking skills. Although there is no specific methodology closely related to CLIL, however, according to the CLIL guidebook of the CLIL4U project of the E.U., there are approaches and settings that have common features, especially when emphasizing on co-operation, communication, motivation and active learning, such as content-based approach, task-based approach, game-based learning, gamification, web2 tools and digital environments.

Attempting to combine and stress the aforementioned, it can be said that planning and designing a CLIL program or lesson requires gifted, expert and trained teachers who are willing to take into account their students' needs, interests and background knowledge so as to have successful outcomes and results. Teachers adopting CLIL programs and projects need also to be creative in a way that they will be able to design their own materials or spend extra time to find and incorporate authentic materials –in a way that involves a pedagogical adaptation, especially when CLIL is initially implemented (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009) and follows the syllabus of the subjects-

CLIL also requires dynamic teachers who are willing to cooperate in a school or maybe teachers who are able to perform both content and language roles in order for students to be benefited (Pavesi et al 2001; Attard- Montalto &Walter, 2021).

The Program

The purpose of the program

Nowadays, in Greece, language teachers launched a significant number of projects in state Primary Schools attempting to incorporate together with the target language various school subjects: culture -multicultural and intercultural elements-, physical education, environmental studies, history, geography and maths (Griva & Deligianni, 2017b). The results indicated advantages in terms of the cognitive and linguistic development of the students involved in the target language as well as in the understanding of subjects of the existing national school curriculum (Korosidou & Griva 2013; Lasagabaster, 2008). Motivation and cognitive skills - of the CLIL students –especially when compared to those following traditional school curricula and teaching approaches- are also issues that recent researchers are dealing with (Mattheoudakis, Alexiou & Laskaridou, 2014).

Previous studies not only in Greece but also within the European educational context, have led to the need of a CLIL program aiming at investigating CLIL instruction implemented within the limits of a small state school, situated away from the urban state and private schools where students are less exposed to English as well as to further subject oriented knowledge and input.

The present program, attempted to serve the principles of CLIL with a focus on geography, history and aspects of culture of the 9 Greek Geographical districts. Through creating digital educational escape rooms, it aimed at developing primary school students' skills in English as a foreign language, as well as cognitive skills related to aspects of culture, history and geography.

The specific objectives of the program were set as follows:

- to enhance students' knowledge in terms of geographical, historical and cultural aspects,
- to develop students' cultural awareness and understanding.
- to increase their interest and motivation in terms of the English language,
- to improve student's ability to use English in order to communicate in authentic environments,
- to promote receptive and productive skills in EFL,
- to enhance their I.T. skills in digital settings.

Participants - Sample

The educational program "Travelling to Greek neighborhoods with English": Design and implementation of a CLIL program at a Primary School- was piloted with a small state Primary School in Northern Greece, with sixteen 5th grade students (10 to 11 years old) willing to overcome the "barrier" of living away from big cities and "demanding" to improve their knowledge through innovative, interesting, motivating new teaching and learning approaches and methods. More specifically, the program engaged sixteen Greek-speaking 5th grade students who had been taught English at school for five years, for 2- 3 hours per week, according to the state school curriculum, with the same English Teacher. Their competency in English as Foreign Language (EFL) was at level A1+, according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). Students attended twelve 3-hour sessions, from November 2021 to March 2022, without extending or altering the school timetable.

Design of the program

"Travelling to Greek neighborhoods with English": Design and implementation of a CLIL program at a Primary School was intended to create digital educational environments and educational escape rooms in order to promote students' skills in the target language (EFL) and at the same time to include context and meaning in terms of Greek cultural and historic aspects, of the 9 Greek geographical districts. Since CLIL -as an educational practice- can cover a wide range of approaches and models, the particular program was based on the principles of Game-based Learning and escape rooms which are interrelated in a way that emphasizes active involvement, motivation, needs and demands of the students by improving through scaffolding their language skills, their problem solving skills as well as their higher order thinking skills (Coyle et al., 2010; Lockhart Domeno & Lockhart Domeno, 2018). Also, design of the CLIL program was a process based on the principles of Theme-based approach, Game-based approach – gamification, Task-based framework, Educational Escape rooms (using Genially), various Web2 tools and Cultural elements. In addition, the Cs pedagogic framework was emphasized trying to reveal the interrelation between subject, language, thinking, culture and competences (Costa & D-Angelo, 2011, p. 6). CLIL tools were also taken into account in order for the learning route as well as design of the program to be additionally supported.

A Weak/ soft CLIL model was adopted for school timetable not to be altered or extended and to focus mainly on language learning (Ball, 2009; Bentley, 2009), so as to improve primarily students' English language skills and secondly students' competence in the subjects of geography, history and culture.

Implementation of the program

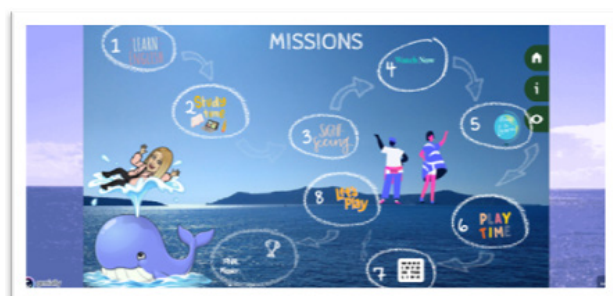
The CLIL program was launched in November 2021 in the English classroom or at the computer lab of the school, so as to use the available teaching aids (interactive whiteboard, projector, personal computers, etc). Interventions were implemented for five months, following CLIL principles combined with the principles of Game-based Learning and escape rooms, incorporating at the same time the Task-based Framework.

At first, the head teacher of the school, teachers and parents were informed and a consent form was sent to parents, to be signed. Then, a Google Form pre-test was given to students to identify their needs in terms of the English language and their background knowledge regarding geography, local history and cultural aspects of the Greek geographical districts.

Implementation of the program involved twelve 3-hour sessions (36 hours), including a pretest, 11 escape rooms and a post-test. Pre and post-tests were created with Google Forms and were sent to students through emails. The 11 escape rooms were designed using the web2 tool Genially, a web platform intended to promote interactive learning by visualizing content in an interesting way that can motivate students and increase their participation and active involvement, especially when enriched with animation, movement, video, audio, quiz, games, infographics, escape rooms, presentations, etc. The platform provides teachers with the opportunity to design creative, innovative games for educational purposes. It also gives students the chance to enjoy learning in an interactive dynamic setting that improves digital competencies and learning outcomes (Genially, 2023).

Picture 2.

Screenshot from the escape rooms



Therefore, for the purposes of this program, apart from the pre and post-test, 11 escape rooms were created using Genially: one for Greece, one for each of the 9 Greek geographical districts (Central Greece, Aegean islands, Crete, Ionian Islands, Peloponnese, Epirus, Thessaly, Thrace, Macedonia), and additionally a Christmas escape room, focusing on the Christmas customs and traditions in Greece.

Table 1.

Escape rooms

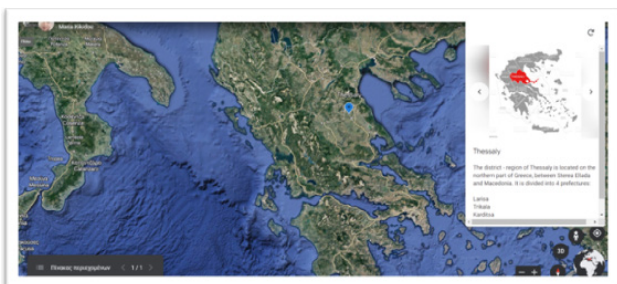
Escape room 1	Greece (Travelling to Greece with Aris and Athena)
Escape room 2	Central Greece (Attica)
Escape room 3	Aegean islands
Escape room 4	Christmas (escape while travelling to Greece)
Escape room 5	Crete
Escape room 6	Ionian Islands
Escape room 7	Peloponnese
Escape room 8	Epirus
Escape room 9	Thessaly
Escape room 10	Thrace
Escape room 11	Macedonia

Each one of the 11 escape rooms was designed and carried out in 3 stages: Pre stage, Task cycle, Follow up stage (Willis, 1996). More specifically:

- Pre stage: was incorporated in the escape rooms as part of the missions and tasks of the game (including various tools such as Google Earth, videos, pictures, etc.). The basic aim of this task was to activate background knowledge as well to introduce new content, vocabulary and terminology in terms of history, geography and culture.

Picture 3.

Screenshot from the pre stage of an escape room



- Task cycle: during the main stage of each session students were put in the centre of the learning process which involved clues, missions, tasks, puzzles, digital games, web2 tools, videos, etc., for the “key” to be found so as to lead students to the next escape room. Task cycle attempted to involve students to authentic communication and meaningful interactions through problem solving and scaffolding and to engage them in a motivating, innovating digital setting.

Picture 4.

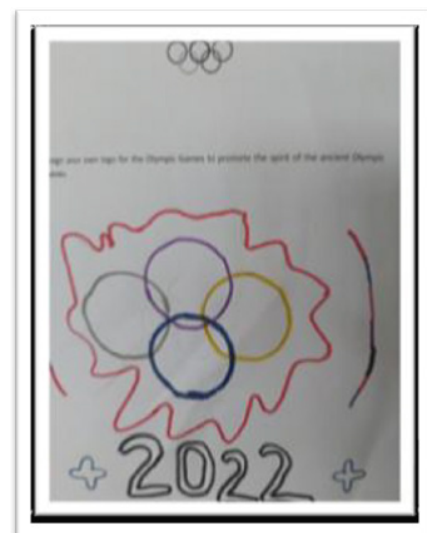
Screenshot from the task cycle of an escape room



Follow up stage: included assignments/activities designed to practice, revise and assess new structures, vocabulary and skills, creating at the same time the “collage of Greece” and revealing the historical, cultural and geographical elements of Greece that students came across with, during implementation of the program. Students, during follow up stage, were required to complete their small piece of a puzzle which was part of a big collage of artifacts and crafts, for the new knowledge to be practiced and immediate feedback to be given. Students were also engaged in presentations of their work and discussions related to the content they were taught about.

Picture 5.

Screenshot from the follow up stage of an escape room



Pre stage, task cycle and follow up stage were completed within a three hour intervention. Pre stage and task cycle were incorporated in the escape rooms. Extra educational and digital games were designed, and authentic materials were found in order to be included within the escape rooms -usually as part of the task cycle-, not only for educational purposes, but also to make the experience even more interesting and motivating for students.

Evaluation of the program

In order to evaluate the impact of each escape room designed and of each intervention implemented and to determine their added value on students' language skills and on content knowledge and cognitive skills, alternative instruments and tools were employed. Therefore, assessment of the program was based on alternative ways involving summative, formative and final evaluation and attempting to put students in the centre of the learning and teaching process. It was a significant part of the program which not only stressed the innovation of alternative evaluation in the educational process, but also, it noted and highlighted the importance of the outcomes in terms of design, implementation and feasibility. Therefore, the educational program was evaluated with:

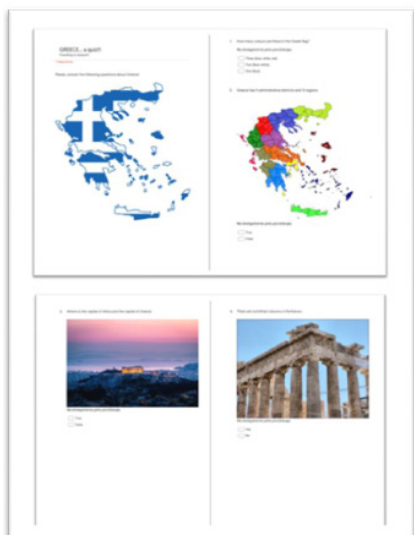
- Pre & Post-test (summative evaluation)
- Teacher's/ Researcher's journal (on going – formative evaluation)
- Digital Padlet (on going – formative evaluation)
- Satisfaction questionnaire – at the end of the program

Pre/post-test

Pre-test –which was designed with Google Forms as part of the summative evaluation of the program- was based on the content of the 11 escape rooms and it revealed students' needs and background knowledge in terms of geography, history and culture. The pre-test included 15 close type questions and pictures to be interesting for students, and two open questions at the end of the test, where students were requested to provide short answers. The post-test involved the same questions. It was carried out by the students at the end of the implementation of the program.

Picture 6.

Screenhot from the pre-test.



15 out of 16 students took part in the pre-test and 14 out of 16 students completed the post-test. Students' participation revealed their active involvement and motivation and furthermore, comparison of the results of both tests highlighted the trend of CLIL towards active development of language and content skills.

Table 2.

Question results of the Pre and post-test

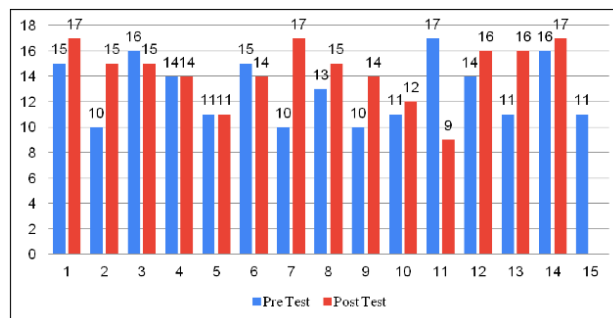


Table 3.

Correct answers (pre/post-test)

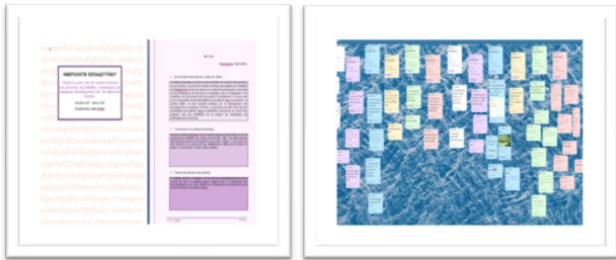
Questions	Pre Test	Post Test Σ
1	15	14
2	9	12
3	13	12
4	6	8
5	8	8
6	15	14
7	8	11
8	10	11
9	13	14
10	15	13
11	14	14
12	10	12
13	13	14
14	13	14
15	8	7
16	15	14
17	9	10

Teacher's/ Researcher's journal

Concerning Teacher's/ Researcher's journal, it can be said that it was in fact a qualitative self-reflective analysis, as part of the formative evaluation -which was mainly emphasized. Digital Padlet was also another tool used for the formative evaluation; students were writing their opinion in relation to the escape rooms.

Picture 7, 8.

Screenshots from the electronic researcher's journal and from the Digital Padlet.



More specifically, the researcher's journal included 4 different questions for each one of the escape rooms (Q.1. "Which of the aims of the CLIL lesson were achieved?", Q.2. Which was the most difficult part of the CLIL lesson?", Q.3. "Which activity was the best for students?", Q.4. "Would I change something?") and an extra reflective comment. The entries of the teacher/researcher were kept in the digital journal after the completion of each of the 3 hour sessions. Qualitative analysis of the journal was carried out to provide credible results for the success of the program, according to which the following typologies, categories/ subcategories and frequency of the entries were identified as follows, in the table below:

Table 4.
Journal Records

Questions	Categories	Frequency
	Vocabulary	8
1. "Which of the aims of the CLIL lesson were achieved?"	Missions/ activities/ worksheets	5
	Participation/ motivation	8
	Methodology/ Process/ School subjects/ Language	11
2. Which was the most difficult part of the CLIL lesson?	Vocabulary/ terminology	3
	Missions/ worksheets/ quizzes	6
	No difficulties	8
3. Which activity was the best for students?	Web 2/ Multimedia (Personal Computers/ Interactive white board, etc.)	3
	Escape room/missions/ Activities/ quizzes	10
	Location	4
	Sounds/ Songs	2
	No change	8
4. Would I change something?	Time/ Duration	2
	Content/Structure	4
	Missions/ Worksheets/ Quizzes	3

Researcher's/ teacher's journal was a time consuming process which however worked as a really useful tool in terms of reflecting and improving the educational implementation of the program. It therefore revealed

that the aims of the program were achieved regarding methodology, participation/ motivation, vocabulary and activities. No problems were noted; on the contrary escape rooms and multimedia were identified as ideal for the purposes of the program. On the whole, the journal reflected that the program was an educational experience that did not require any alteration or modification.

Digital Padlet

The Digital Padlet was also a tool of the formative evaluation. Students, by the completion of each of the 3 hour session of the CLIL program, were required to participate by writing at the Digital Padlet their opinion in terms of the things they liked or did not like, of the best and the most difficult activity they came across with. Their attitudes were recorded successfully providing data for the CLIL program in a digital and fun way. The Digital Padlet was in fact an authentic, co-operative and communicative environment for students, which gave them the opportunity to reflect, to post and express their opinion and to be actively involved in the educational process. Their participation after each 3 hour session was impressive and their positive comments were encouraging and motivating.

Satisfaction Questionnaire

Picture 9.

Screenshot from the satisfaction questionnaire.



Satisfaction questionnaire -which was also employed-provided insights in terms of students' feelings and attitudes towards implementation and completion, at the end of the innovative program. Students were required to provide answers to 4 open ended questions (Q.1. "What did you like of the program?", Q.2. "Was there a difficult part?", Q.3. Was there anything else that you would like to do during this journey?", Q.4. Would you like to take part in a digital journey in Greece again?") in Greek. Students' answers were also recorded and analyzed in a qualitative way at the end of the program to determine attitudes, advantages and difficulties encountered. Results indicated that the program was successful, as described in the table below:

Table 5.
Satisfaction Questionnaire Records

Categories	Subcategories	Frequency
1. What did you like of the program;	Games/ quizzes/ work-sheets	6
	School subjects (English, history, culture, geography)	2
	Songs/ videos	2
	Activities	4
	Other	3
2. Was there a difficult part?	No difficulties encountered	13
	Difficulties in terms of the terminology	1
3. Was there anything else that you would like to do during this journey?	To know more about other places/ to learn even more	2
	Escape room (outdoors/ Easter escape room/ other places), to create my own escape rooms	5
	No	3
	4. Would you like to take part in a digital journey in Greece again?	Yes

Discussion - Limitations

The CLIL program, initially attempted to find out whether educational escape games can create the conditions for teachers to adopt CLIL approach and for students to be actively involved and motivated, so as to improve their skills both in English as a target language (T.L.) as well as in terms of the subjects of geography, history and culture. The twelve 3 hours interventions (completed following Willis's Pre stage and Task cycle with the 11 escape games and Follow up stage), the qualitative evaluation (through teacher's/ researcher's journal, Digital Padlet, satisfaction questionnaire) combined with the quantitative evaluation of the pre and post-test and the results of the previous research, indicated the contribution of CLIL and digital educational escape rooms to language and content learning.

More specifically, the results of the study revealed both language and content benefits for CLIL learners; it therefore highlighted the positive impact of CLIL on EFL students' performance as well as on the subjects of geography, history and culture in terms of content. Of course, it should be mentioned that students were motivated by the use of escape games that the CLIL program was based on, as indicated by the existing literature on game-based learning and gamification, following the principles of CLIL. Apart from the above, it should be noted that students managed to work as part of a team and collaborate for the purposes of the program. Finally, it can be said that this CLIL program added to our research-based knowledge and also that it has the potential to contribute to the improvement of English language skills along with subject matter by young students -especially in the current educational system in Greece.

In spite of the fact that the number of students involved was limited (16 students) and the difficulties that the researcher encountered (not available CLIL material, restricted time, restricted teaching aids, small sample and limited number of previous researches in Greece) were important, it should be noted that there is a need to introduce CLIL in State Primary School education; that is according to the results of this pilot study which indicated that in spite of the fact that its scale cannot be considered as broad enough to make generalizations, however, continuation of CLIL programs to other Greek Primary Schools should not be neglected. Therefore, the need to adopt innovative, dynamic teaching approaches, such as CLIL, should be considered as of great importance and thus, state should encourage teachers to be part of this hopeful trend that puts students in the centre of the educational process.

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