

An Reflective Research on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Implementation Strategies in Pedagogical-oriented Class for English Majors Students

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Abstract

CLIL is currently getting popularity across the educational field. It is considered as a method applied in subject classes to improve students' both content knowledge and language ability in the medium of additional language. However, the problem of the balance between language and content for instruction makes the implementation of CLIL complicated and challenge-able. investigation from different perspectives were conducted: some investigation take CLIL as a methodological approach; meanwhile some others view CLIL in terms of curriculum. CLIL has been implemented as a mainstream approach at all stages of education in European countries since it was coined in twenty nineties. However, it is a new pedagogical approach in Chinese context, especially in Chinese college education. English as a foreign language for Chinese students, has been considered one of the most crucial subjects in school. Educators tend to ignore its instrumental function. With the increasing investigation on English teaching, it focuses no longer on the instruction of grammar, vocabulary and sentence pattern. More importantly, it is necessary to integrate the knowledge of nature, geography, humanities and other related subjects into English teaching, and constantly enhance students' English communication ability, thereby giving full play to the role of English as a communication tool. Therefore, this reflective investigation attempts to present and justify an appropriate curriculum of CLIL in Chinese college based on both my college learning and teaching experience, and illustrate the implementation strategies in CLIL classroom.

Keywords

CLIL; Methodology and Curriculum; College English; Chinese Pedagogical Context.

1. Introduction

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language' (Coyle et al., 2010: 1). According to this definition, CLIL is considered as a method applied in subject classes to improve students' both content knowledge and language ability in the medium of additional language. However, the problem of the balance between language and content for instruction makes the implementation of CLIL complicated and challenge-able. Furthermore, when it comes to CLIL as an educational approach, different views are held from investigationners and educators. Some scholars argue that CLIL is an instructional technique used in subject classes to enhance students' L2 language ability (Ball and Lindsay, 2010; cited Cenoz, et al., 2014), which actually treats CLIL as 'an innovative methodological approach' (Eurydice, 2006: 7); while some others view CLIL in curricular term. For example, Baetens Beardsmore (2002) took an understanding of CLIL in terms of curricular design and timetable organization in subject classes. All these arguments to some extent can be the stepping stone to

the achievements of CLIL in theoretical investigation and educational practice in Chinese context.

Although CLIL has been implemented as a mainstream approach at all stages of education in European countries for decades of years (Coyle, 2013) because of the increasingly frequent international exchanges in a wide range of fields (such as employment, education), it is a new pedagogical approach in Chinese context. With the development of internationalization, bilingual education has attracted much more attention because of the necessity and advantages in global cooperation and competition. CLIL lessons provide students opportunities to acquire cross-disciplinary abilities, improve their use of English in real situations, and raise their intercultural awareness. However, although Chinese Ministry of Education has made a series of relevant policies to promote the utilization of English in subject classes in tertiary education, CLIL in Chinese context is in its infancy with plenty of deficiencies in both theoretical investigation and teaching practice.

The form of CLIL in different pedagogical contexts may be different. Based on my own experience as a learner and teacher in college, several factors may influence the implementation of CLIL in China. Apart from the factors such as educators and students' understanding of the aims of CLIL, difficulty of establishing complete CLIL curriculum may be another important reasons because of different levels of students' English proficiency and their demands for language ability. Therefore, based on my understanding of CLIL and teaching experience in college, this investigation attempts to present and justify an appropriate curriculum of CLIL in my pedagogical context, and illustrate the implementation strategies in CLIL classroom.

2. Context

The context of this reflective investigation is based on my learning experience in the English department of Jinan University, which is famous for its great emphasis given on education (the hometown of Confucius). Two cultivation orientations are designed: pedagogy-oriented and business-oriented. Most of the students in this department choose the pedagogy-oriented class, because of its good quality of teaching and the great quantity of learning resources. As one member of the pedagogy-oriented classes, a wide range of courses are arranged in my timetable. Apart from the English language-based courses with their content including the four basic English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), linguistic knowledge, translating ability, etc., some pedagogical courses are added to our timetable as compulsory course to make preparations for my teaching career, such as An Introduction of Education, English Language Teaching, Second Language Acquisition investigation. All these courses are needed to be taught in English. The test papers are written in English as the assessment at the end of each semester. Students in the English department come from all over the country, with different English learning habits and methods. Although their overall English proficiency level does not have a clear distinction because of the minimum passing mark for admission, students from different places are taught English in various ways, and their language skills to some degree have some differences. Furthermore, based on my experience and observation, the scores of the college entrance examination cannot display students' whole English ability, it may be an evidence of linguistic knowledge, but cannot present students' language competence, especially their communication skills. Most of the Chinese students, especially these in rural areas, feel discouragement in English communication skills because of the teaching methodology in their middle school classroom. However, this ability greatly influences students' study and classroom engagement in CLIL class.

Most of the teachers in the English department have a good master of English and enable to use it in their class. Unlike other disciplines in CLIL class, teachers in pedagogical courses, such as

English Language Teaching, Second Language Acquisition investigation, are the experts both in pedagogical knowledge and language proficiency, and enable to consciously adopt various teaching approaches to improve students' content knowledge and language ability.

However, not all teachers are proficient in both subject knowledge and English. Due to the bilingual teaching requirements of the college, teachers who have sufficient knowledge of education with low level of English proficiency became increasingly challenging in their teaching. Language impedes the efficiency of instruction, and makes the content more difficult to understand than that is taught in Chinese. Similar dilemma occurs in my class as a teacher in a moderate college. Subject to low English level of the pedagogical-oriented students, it is a difficult task for them to understand both the language and the pedagogical content. CLIL is a very useful curriculum for both teachers and students with numerous benefits, but it is not for all of them. The prerequisite of applying CLIL is to clarify its aim and English level of both teachers and students, and figure out some implementation strategies in CLIL class in line with the actual situation.

3. Curriculum of CLIL

The establishment of CLIL in China is still at its initial stage. Although CLIL has been introduced in tertiary education, most of the regulations are essentially administrative. Based on my learning and teaching experience, I attempt to demonstrate one appropriate curriculum of CLIL for pedagogical-oriented courses, focusing on its aims, choice of materials as well as the forms to evaluate students' achievements.

3.1. The Aim of CLIL

It is clear that CLIL is an integration of content and language learning, rather than the foreign language learning and teaching (Wolff, 2010). It is designed to teach the content of subject from different perspectives in the media of the target language whilst developing specific language skills or abilities. Essentially, CLIL as a dynamic term, supplies an educational perspective that goes beyond the learning of the content of subject and foreign language (Coyle et al. 2010). Based on the definition of CLIL and the context of this investigation, two aims of CLIL occupy the outstanding place among the overall aims.

The first aim of this curriculum is to enhance students' linguistic competence and communication skills as well as their motivation on English learning. As a teacher in English major in a college, developing students' linguistic competence plays the fundamental role in my class. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2009) recognized the positive influence of CLIL instruction on students' attitudes towards English and the efficiency of English learning. This study believes that CLIL approach supplies more intense and meaningful exposure for students to use the target language, and it is claimed that language learning happens more efficiently in authentic situations rather than other contexts. The content of pedagogical courses provides topics for the pedagogy-oriented students to carry out meaningful interaction through a variety of tasks in the class. The authentic materials in CLIL classroom promotes students' motivation and on English learning (Lasagabaster, 2011).

The second aim is to develop students' ability of viewing educational issues from different perspectives and cultural angles. Different language stands for different thinking models, and thus can provide different perspectives for a deep understanding of the pedagogical courses in CLIL class. Apart from the aim of enriching the discipline-related knowledge, raising the intercultural awareness get an intercultural understanding of the educational issues is also significant for English major students. Fostering students' intercultural ability caters for the need of international exchange and cooperation. Furthermore, the pedagogy-oriented students are the pre-service English teachers, and their cultural awareness will influence the cultural

development of their future students. Different from the instruction simply in Chinese, the CLIL program not only is a combination of two disciplines into one class, but also the integration of two different cultures, which makes the viewing of educational issues in a multicultural way (Wolff, 2010).

3.2. The Choice of CLIL Materials

Materials is the fundamental carrier in the implementation of CLIL. However, the sophisticated system of CLIL materials in China has not yet been established. Most of the materials are imported from other countries. On one hand, it to some extent promotes the development of the domestic CLIL materials and the academic exchange about CLIL materials in the international platform. On the other hand, the original English materials blindly introduced in large quantities not only spends large amounts of money, but also is not totally suitable to the Chinese educational context and culture. There are some self-compiled materials through the compilation of several articles, which are lack of the systematic professional knowledge and cognitive consideration. Therefore, this part will provide some principles in the choice of appropriate CLIL materials.

Coyle's 4Cs Framework (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) wins the high recognition of both investigation and educators in its guidance of the construction of CLIL materials. The 4Cs stand for content, cognition, communication, and culture, and are the necessary components of CLIL materials.

Content provides a teaching and learning platform for the CLIL program, and is the main carrier of all activities in the CLIL lesson. Although the balance may vary in different contexts, the assumption of the role of language and content is equal in a CLIL program (Kiely, 2011). CLIL should not merely be considered as a foreign language teaching method. It is a program with dual focus on both language and content (Ioannou, 2012). The foreign language is content-driven, generated from the needs of the content, and is used to promote learners' understanding of the subject. Furthermore, Gondová (2015) claimed that CLIL materials should be personalized and provide students enough space to construct their own relevant knowledge and to comprehend the content of the subject. For example, the teaching materials of the course English Language Teaching should be closely related to the English teaching theories and activities, and the vocabulary or phrases focus on the terminology of language teaching and learning. There are a variety of teaching materials adopted in CLIL class, such as coursebook, video clips, images, etc. The choice of content of the content subject should be carefully considered about according to the needs of students in the contexts.

In the process of knowledge construction, learners develop their cognition ability from the lower-order thinking level (remember, understand, apply) to higher-order thinking level (analyse, evaluate, create) (Krathwohl, 2002), and have an insight of their metacognitive skills (Gondová, 2015). Therefore, the function of quality CLIL materials is not used to simply transfer new knowledge, but to create appropriate learning environment to help learners construct independently the knowledge of both the content and language (Mehisto, 2012). Teaching materials need to provide cognitive challenges for learners to develop their own cognitive styles. Besides, based on Bloom's taxonomy of cognition, the sequence of teaching materials should be taken into consideration in learners' cognitive processes to avoid their excessive cognitive load. Quality CLIL materials play an important role in establishing learner's sense of security in terms of English acquisition, the educational knowledge learning and the management of their own learning (ibid.) in the context of this investigation.

Language competence, especially the communication ability is one key part of CLIL. Meaningful and authentic CLIL materials provide opportunities to help students enhance their input (listening & reading) and output (speaking & writing) ability applied in subject-specific topics (Gondová, 2015). In other words, CLIL materials are the crucial resources for students to get

higher level of academic English proficiency, and scaffold for the content subject teachers to identify and teach the academic English (Mehisto, 2012). For the English major students, improving their English communication skills always occupies the outstanding position in their university study. Because of the integration of English and the educational content in one class, there are sufficient topics and resources in the class for students to enhance their communication ability in the process of discussing about authentic and meaningful educational issues. All teaching materials can be the resources for the development of communication competence if they are used appropriately.

Share the same cultural objectives of CLIL program, quality materials should include either implicit or explicit cultural elements. Instead of simply talking about the festivals, national food, or arts, the quality CLIL materials can guide students to have a wider sense of the word 'culture', and have different perspectives on the pedagogical issues. For instance, cultural element can be reflected in students' different learning styles and teaching outcome. The pedagogy in China emphasises on the purpose and outcome of learning, which is beneficial to the establishment of the complete knowledge system; whilst the pedagogy in most western countries intends to cultivate students' learning autonomy and their creativity. Through the comparison of different educational aims and methodology in different cultural contexts, students can learn more about the connotation of culture in pedagogy context. Therefore, the choice of CLIL materials should be sensitive to the cultural element in order to foster the international understanding.

3.3. The Assessment of CLIL

CLIL assessment is different from the assessment of the traditional teaching programs with single subject. It should take the goals of both the foreign language and the content subject into consideration (Massler, 2011). The assessment to some degree influences the content and methods of teaching in classroom. Through the assessment of CLIL program, teachers know about their teaching effectiveness, and students learn about the depth and breadth of their subject knowledge and foreign language competence. However, Hönig (2009) claimed that for most of the time, there was a discrepancy between what was tested in the exam and the expected goals of CLIL, such as the enhancement of cultural awareness and the language competence, which are generally ignored in the assessment.

The same issue occurs in my learning experience in the English department. The assessment form of the course An Introduction of Education adopts paper testing including both subjective and objective questions. Although the language used in the exam paper is English, the teacher marks according to the content of pedagogy, and the feedback focuses on the pedagogical knowledge without any linguistic corrections or comments. The teachers who have taught this course admit that students' understanding of educational knowledge accounts for almost the whole proportion of the test, and the linguistic competence should be assessed in their language-focused tests. Besides, since they are the experts in pedagogical field and are more familiar with the pedagogical knowledge, they give marks and feedback unconsciously focusing on the content knowledge rather than the language competence.

It is not an easy task to change the teachers' viewpoint about language and content, but the assessment form can be adjusted to meet the goals of CLIL in this context. Apart from paper testing, essay can be another method to evaluate students' learning outcome in this course. To achieve the aims of goals and keep consistency with the 4Cs framework, the refined assessment criteria should be specified according to content, communication, cognitive and culture. The grade of each criterion and the overall grade are clearly displayed at the end of the essay. This assessment form is helpful to deepen both students' and teachers' understanding of the essence and goal of CLIL.

4. Methodology

Apart from the aims, choice of materials, and the assessment of CLIL, teaching methodology is another key factor that influences the outcome of CLIL. Despite the increasing research about CLIL, methodological resources and practical guidance are limited for CLIL teachers to plan teaching activities with dual focus. Each subject has its didactic approaches to impart knowledge, but in CLIL class the instruction methods double. For instance, in the education class, a great number of theories, principles are imparted through various teaching methods and activities, which do not occur in the same amount in English language class. The English language class pays more attention on the linguistic knowledge, and activities are designed to mainly improve the four language skills. The integration of these two disciplines can produce a greater variety of teaching methods, activities and resources (Çekrezi, 2011).

Based on the 4Cs framework (Coyle, 1999), this investigation attempts to figure out three strategies to integrate the English competence and pedagogical knowledge in the implementation of CLIL.

4.1. The First Strategy: Authentic and Challenging Input

The specific needs of the content subject in CLIL class occupies the central position in the choice of teaching materials and material construction. Although the specified coursebook is the main material in CLIL classroom in China, teachers have the right to choose the materials of each unit and the sequence of presenting them to students. The authentic, meaningful and challenging teaching materials are helpful to stimulate students' motivation for classroom discussions and higher order thinking. Besides, SLA studies demonstrate that meaningful and challenging input plays a positive effect on foreign language acquisition, especially on students' communication competence by negotiating authentic issues with others.

For pedagogy-oriented students in English major, CLIL is one of the most appropriate teaching approaches, as both English competence and educational knowledge are requisite for their future career. On one hand, the authentic and meaningful teaching materials are easily accessible to both the teacher and students, as they are in various kinds of educational contexts, and all educational phenomena and activities can be used as the teaching materials for students to understand educational theories. On the other hand, improving English competence is regarded as one of the most important tasks for English major students. The authentic and meaningful materials in CLIL provide them more topics and real situations to achieve this aim through rich English input. Therefore, the input in CLIL classroom should be meaningful and closely connect with students' daily lives to make students understand the educational knowledge and develop their English ability.

The struggle for authentic and challenging materials should not ignore the role of teacher in performing language operations and sequencing the materials (Meyer, 2010). The CLIL teacher acts as a language role-model for students in language operation, such as describing the educational issues or phenomena, presenting a investigation poster, analyzing video clips, or verbalizing their thinking process (ibid). Besides, as learning is a complex cognitive process, to make the teaching materials more understandable and make the input intake as much as possible, CLIL teacher can divide these materials into several segments and sequence them according to Bloom's taxonomy (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and assessment) (Chi, 2009). For example, to guide students to make a critical evaluation about one authentic educational case, some basic theories and rationale should be presented at the beginning of the class, and a series of questions are designed to make sure that the relevant knowledge have been understood by students, as the critical evaluation should be conducted based on the prior knowledge. The rationale of sequencing different input is consistent with human being's cognitive process.

4.2. The Second Strategy: Scaffolding

Like the elaborated sequencing of teaching materials in CLIL class, teacher's appropriate scaffolding also can make the challenging input become intake as much as possible. The scaffolding teaching strategy supports students' cognitive process based on their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002) and facilitates their ability of intaking new knowledge and language competence on the basis of existing knowledge (Van, 2002).

According to Meyer (2010), scaffolding in CLIL classroom mainly serves three purposes. The first one is to reduce the cognitive and linguistic load, and to help students understand the content and foreign language of the given materials. The second one is to assist students to complete the learning tasks by appropriately structuring and sequencing materials. The third purpose is to verbalise students' thought in the subject manner and develop their academic language proficiency by supplying necessary vocabulary or phrases in certain field. Meyer's (2010) study believes that the students who are whether gifted in language learning or not get great benefits from scaffolding.

A variety of scaffolding strategies in CLIL classroom can be adopted in different contexts. For instance, in the context of this investigation, elaborately designed questioning done right may be one useful strategy for students to understand the complicated educational issues or theories and meanwhile to enhance their ability of using English in pedagogical contexts. Purposefully questioning is not easy to implement in CLIL classroom. According to Manouchehri and Lapp (2003), asking appropriate questions needs to be on the basis of the familiarity with students' learning ability and thoughtful planning, as well as reflection on and analysis of the content subject goals of lessons. To guide students to deeply understand subject content and evaluate the pedagogical issues in a critical way, teachers need to adopt a wide range of scaffolding strategies according to the specific situation of educational knowledge and students' English proficiency level as well as learning ability.

4.3. The Third Strategy: Interaction and Output

Long's Interaction Hypothesis proposes that language acquisition is promoted through the utilisation of the target language in the process of interaction. Similarly, Swain (1993) claims that modified output facilitates the L2 development, since learners need to make full use of all relevant resources and knowledge for the output. Furthermore, the reflection and further modification of output promote knowledge comprehensibility and language accuracy. The interaction and output not only promote the foreign language development in language learning class, but also are the efficient strategies used in CLIL classroom.

Student interaction and output are generally triggered by various tasks in the class (Meyer, 2010). Each task can be designed based on the need of the content of the content subject in CLIL classroom. Therefore, to some extent, Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be considered as one part of the CLIL methodology. Interaction occurs in the process of conducting the task, which includes the cognitive process of learning knowledge about the content subject and the development of communication skills.

Interaction and output can be the feasible teaching strategies adopted in the CLIL classroom (such as the courses of An Introduction of Education, English Language Teaching, Second Language Acquisition investigation) in the English department in the context of this investigation. For instance, when students are asked to conduct group discussion and critically evaluate an educational case in terms of classroom management, it is a good opportunity for students to exchange their viewpoints with each other and thereby get a deeper understanding of the theoretical knowledge through interacting with group members. Meanwhile, their communication ability is developed in this process. Presenting the outcome of their discussion in front of the classroom is not only a demonstration of their understanding of the knowledge

about classroom management, but also a monitor process of English performance, which is helpful to further facilitate English language learning. Therefore, a task or a teaching method designed appropriately can offers students an opportunity to improve their understanding of content knowledge, communication competence as well as their lower-order thinking and higher-order thinking level. In addition, if some tasks including the comparison and evaluation of Chinese and other countries' educational systems and patterns, it can be a feasible approach to raise students' intercultural awareness.

5. Conclusion

CLIL is an emerging educational approach both in European countries and China, and occurs as the trend of internationalization. CLIL program is conducted mainly in tertiary education in China. research and theories have been developed in some European countries, but because of the difference in educational system and cultural background between different countries, their CLIL curriculum system and teaching methodology should be revised or created according to their own specific context.

This investigation focuses on some key issues about the curriculum and strategies of choosing methodology adopted in CLIL program in Chinese tertiary education based on my learning experience. Curriculum nearly covers all aspects of one educational program, but the aim, the choice of materials, methodology as well as the assessment form the frame of this curriculum. Different from other EMI forms, CLIL is a dual-focus teaching program and requires a strong collaboration between the content subject and the foreign language. The 4Cs framework (content, communication, cognitive, culture) (Coyle,1999) can be the principle in the establishment of the CLIL curriculum, which is also consistent with the goals of the CLIL program set by the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, the feasible methodology attracts much more attentions than other aspects of the curriculum from the CLIL teachers. Because of the integration of content subject and the foreign language in one classroom, the traditional teaching methods for the single subject meet challenges in practice. A variety of activities are designed and implemented in CLIL class. Although the specific teaching methods are various in different situations, the strategies of designing CLIL methodology to some extent are applicable in different contexts. The interactive teaching methods with various kinds of tasks or activities provide both CLIL teachers and students new perspectives on educational practice and English language learning in the context of this investigation. The integration of one content subject with foreign language will be a good chance for the exchange of different cultures around the world.

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