

Challenges of Adopting CLIL in Private Schools in Beijing

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Abstract: This paper examines the application and challenges of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in China. CLIL, as a pedagogical approach utilizing a foreign language as the medium of instruction, aims to enhance education and foster a global perspective. In China, despite being considered an innovative model, CLIL implementation faces various difficulties, including inadequate exposure to the second language (L2), low proficiency among teachers and students, and overly simplified materials. However, research suggests that CLIL can boost students' confidence and proficiency in L2 environments. Therefore, addressing these challenges and improving teacher input and material quality are essential for more effective CLIL implementation.

Keywords: CLIL; Language education; Challenges; Implementation; Second language acquisition; Proficiency

1. Introduction

Before 1980, only a few educational institutions in Europe were able to offer the opportunity to learn content through a second/foreign language. Since 1980, the CLIL model has emerged and developed considerably in the 1990s (Marsh, 2002).

Learning through CLIL is still a relatively new concept in Asia. Under the influence of internationalization and globalization, China, a developing nation, has implemented or modified CLIL or CLIL in several schools in order to stay up with worldwide educational developments (Wei & Feng, 2015).

However, a number of potential challenges and constraints exist (Wei & Feng, 2015). This thesis investigates the application of CLIL. In China, the CLIL pedagogy is an innovative model, so there are various difficulties and challenges in implementing CLIL.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of CLIL

Despite the fact that there are numerous definitions, they all seem to share the idea that CLIL is a "combination" of "merging" fields of study and language learning. According to Marsh (2002), the term "CLIL" is wide and encompasses activities where a foreign language is used as a tool for learning other non-linguistic disciplines, and language is just as important as academic skills.

In China, Liu huiying and Huang Fuqua (2013) argue that CLIL integrates subject content with language learning, unlike traditional language teaching and subject teaching. Teachers develop resources that correspond to specific teaching contexts. A new form of education integrates language and subject matter (content) and is mediated in the maternal tongue and another language (the language that learners have been taught since childhood).

2.2 Key characteristics of CLIL

The following facets illustrate the qualities of CLIL: firstly, in terms of pedagogy, some prominent researchers such as Coyle (2010) and Dale & Tanner (2012) argue that CLIL is a combination of subject teaching and language teaching, which is a relatively new educational concept that demonstrates its uniqueness and its difference from other conventional teaching methods. Secondly, CLIL is applied in different educational contexts, as well as in specific scientific areas.

2.3 4CS framework

The 4Cs conceptual framework, which Coyle (2007) suggested, focus on the interplay of content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (learning and thinking), and culture (social awareness of one's self and "other").

Coyle (1999) lays the groundwork for uniting the different components of CLIL and encourages the advancement of CLIL pedagogy by offering a comprehensive conceptual framework for the 4Cs.

The "4Cs" — content, cognitive, communicative, and cultural — are complementary to one another, incorporated into subject-matter learning and language development, and act as a structure to tie the complete process of learning together (Meyer, 2015).

It's a difficulty that academics all across the world are only now starting to address in immersive and multilingual programs. However, in these programs, citizens will most likely be genuinely prepared to make a significant contribution to themselves and our global society.

2.4 Benefits of CLIL

1. The CLIL method may be more effective in improving students' language proficiency than other teaching methods.

The CLIL classroom can help learners make more significant progress in their English language proficiency. This method can provide students with a language learning environment above and beyond other teaching methods, enable them to change their learning style, and promote brain development and cognition. (Dale and Tanner, 2012).

2. CLIL can motivate students to learn and provide authentic learning situations.

CLIL typically emphasizes authentic learning experiences rather than only language knowledge and structures (Heine, 2010). Doiz (2014) contends that compared to non-CLIL students, CLIL students are typically more passionate and driven. CLIL may provide more encouragement and motivation to learn than the regular curriculum.

3. Co-teaching like CLIL can be seen as a form of team teaching that improves the quality of teaching by providing CLIL.

Teachers have more opportunities to consult and interact with their peers, allowing teachers to collaborate with their colleagues and effective team teaching (Farrell, 2007).

2.5 Criticisms of CLIL

Because the disadvantages of CLIL are not fully taken into account, it provides a perfect picture, implying that teachers rarely have problems. Indeed, CLIL success claims are frequently stated without a substantial amount of empirical proof (Coyle, 2007a; Bruton, 2011). Understanding CLIL and its efficacy in various circumstances require further consideration of its strengths and shortcomings or knowledge gaps. Although the CLIL implementation has many advantages, the fact remains that there can be various problems. We will discuss the disadvantages of CLIL below.

First, it can create enormous stress and obstacles for content teachers, language teachers, and students. Typically, topic teachers lack specialized language knowledge, whereas language teachers are unfamiliar with the subject curriculum (Dale & Tanner, 2012). Secondly, the effort, time, and cost required to enhance the standard of instruction and learning, especially in terms of teacher training and lesson preparation, is significant. CLIL is a relatively new field in education (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2011).

A third issue is that CLIL may diminish the subject's learning material, resulting in a probable mismatch between language and topic skills. According to Ruiz de Zarobe et al. (2010), several studies have demonstrated that L1 learners outperform their CLIL counterparts.

2.6 Research carried out with Chinese learners

Although research on CLIL teaching methods in China is still in its early stages, some valuable findings are already. Chen Wanhao and Xiao Jingrong (2006) discuss the necessity of integrating English with other subjects in primary schools from the perspective of integrating English with other subjects. They argue that the teaching of English should be infused with the knowledge of moral education, mathematics, art, music, and physical education to improve students' comprehensive language skills.

Yang Yinghua (2016) analyses the historical background and rationale of the CLIL approach and concludes that the CLIL approach focuses on subject content, communicative language, reflective cognition, and the 4Cs framework. He argues that CLIL has rich characteristics compared to other English teaching methods.

3. Context

Although research on CLIL pedagogy in China is still preliminary, some valuable research findings have been made. The first academic papers were published in 2007, and more research began to be conducted in 2012. The following are some representative studies.

Huang Xueping and Zuo Zao (2013) introduce the emergence of the Course and Language Integration, the definition and connotation of the concept, the construction of the curriculum, and the implications for foreign language teaching in China. Yang Yinghua (2016) analyses the historical background and principles of the CLIL teaching method and argues that the CLIL teaching method focuses on the integration of subject content, language communication, thinking and cognition, and the 4Cs framework. From the above explanation of the current state of research, it is clear that the scope of research on CLIL in China is limited. In particular, research in primary and secondary education is still inadequate (Wang, 2016).

4. Discussion

4.1 Advantages of CLIL

(1) In the CLIL classroom, it is possible to motivate students and improve their language skills.

In the classroom, when discussing complicated subject matter that the students do not fully understand, the teacher will choose to use L1 to explain it clearly to motivate the students and then use L2 to explain and re-enforce the L2 concepts. This process repeats the subject matter, reinforces the students' language learning, and improves their language skills. At the same time, improve their language skills in the foreign language (Dalton-Puffer, 2007).

(2) The CLIL approach helps increase students' confidence in learning English.

The students' responses to the post-class questionnaire indicated that they believed that they would improve their English language skills because they had learned words related to different subjects and expanded their English language learning. The survey also showed that students enjoyed the CLIL classroom and felt that it would greatly empower them in their present and future. Students enjoyed the classroom atmosphere, enjoyed the teaching style, and were motivated to learn English (Beaudin Curt, 2021).

(3) The need for subject teachers and language teachers to share ideas and work closely together in CLIL classrooms will be more effective.

Furthermore, it is also helpful for teachers' professional development (Dafouz E. & Guerrini, 2009). Team teaching is one of the modes of collaboration that Dale and Tanner (2012) examine for all CLIL teachers before, during, and after school.

4.2 Disadvantages of CLIL

(1) In CLIL classrooms, it is easy to get in the way of content learning and complicate learning. Group communication is often used, which is an excellent way to learn. However, it also has many disadvantages, such as young learners being easily distracted and quickly switching to their L1 in the group because they cannot communicate easily in the foreign language, and induce linguistic phobia (Denman, Tanner, and Graf, 2013).

(2) In CLIL, teachers with insufficient L2 proficiency tend to oversimplify when teaching subject content, leaving students with a suboptimal sense of access (Asomosa, 2015). According to Dalton-Puffer (2008), one of the issues with CLIL courses is that students aren't always able to fully comprehend the curriculum while learning a subject in a foreign language.

5. Suggestions Solutions

Firstly, because CLIL can lead children to experience intense learning anxiety, high stress, and significant problems, in CLIL teaching, teachers should ensure that the group members are reasonably matched and that the division of labor within the group is transparent to enhance students' ability to work together as a team and to provide an authentic guarantee for students to give full play to their initiative. Secondly, in implementing CLIL in the curriculum, we strongly recommend the application of the influential CLIL 4Cs framework in many CLIL schools to provide CLIL lessons more efficiently and flexibly. From both a theoretical and practical standpoint, the 4Cs framework is seen as a tool to organize and arrange CLIL teaching and learning (Ruiz de Zarobe and Lasagabaster. 2010). Finally, to address the underlying issues and challenges of CLIL, the government and the National Education Agency (NEA) must provide policy support for CLIL pedagogy.

6. Conclusion

CLIL creates new chances in a more creative environment, in which the need for concerned parties to communicate, interact, and work together increases in significance (Dafouz and Guerrini, 2009). Effective CLIL requires the constant support, assistance, and encouragement of all stakeholders. The author underlines the value of stakeholder groups' coordinated efforts in CLIL learning and instruction. These groups play a vital role in CLIL (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Therefore, it can be claimed that efficient CLIL courses necessitate the collaboration of all concerned individuals and institutions (Martnez Agudo, 2014) . When comparable situations develop in other topics at school or other CLIL educational environments, these recommendations might be applied; however, they should be modified following the needs of young learners.

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